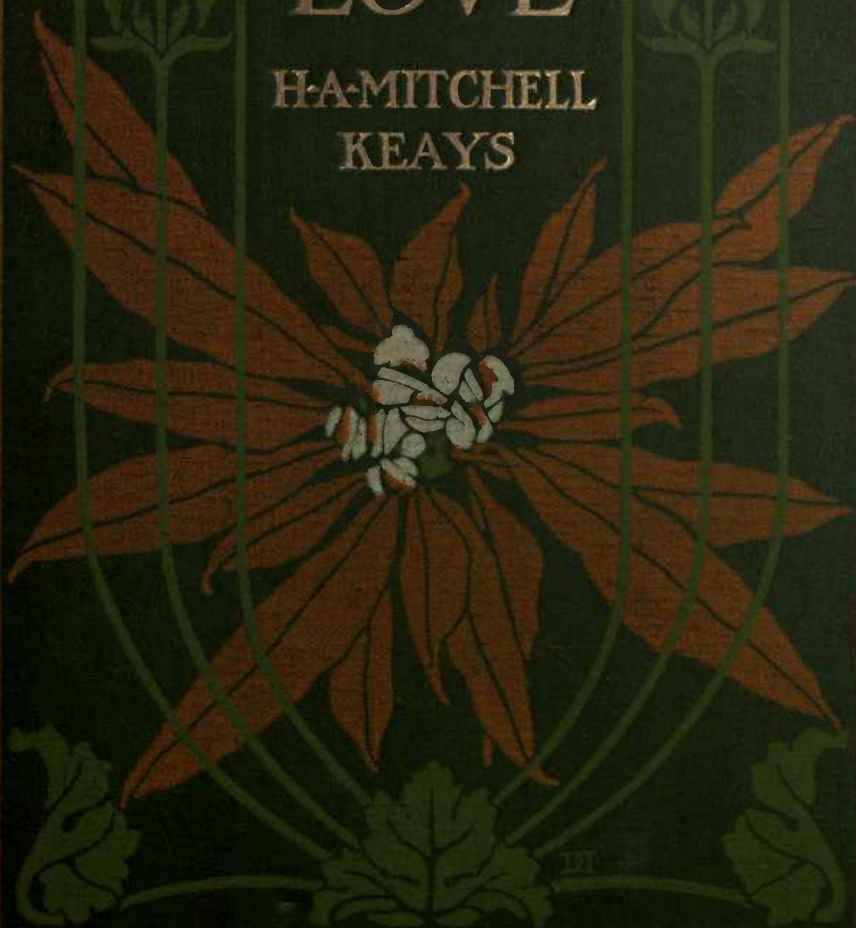
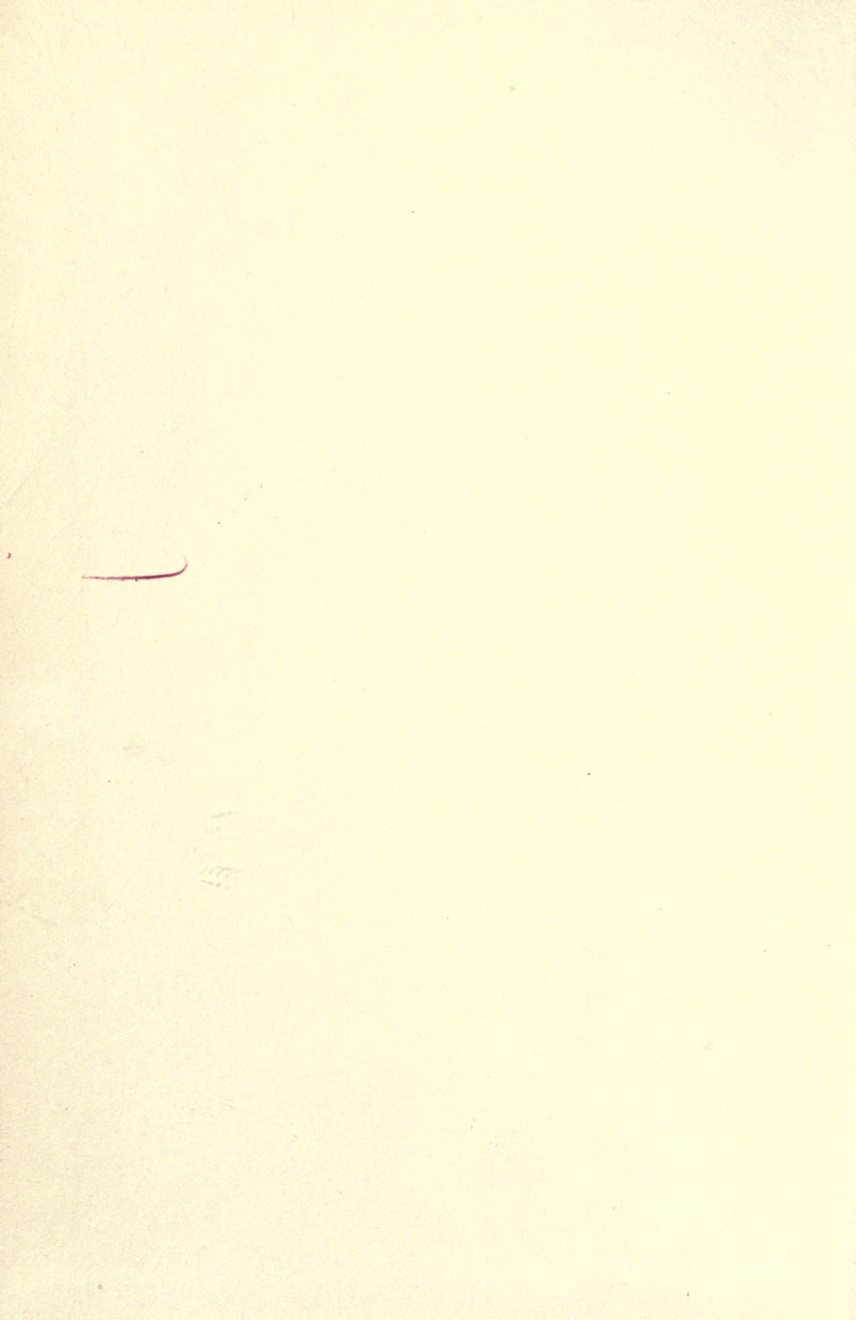


I and
MY
TRUE
LOVE

H·A·MITCHELL
KEAYS



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I AND MY TRUE LOVE



LESTER RALPH

AT the first word Christina turned, her face suddenly white, her eyes wide, her hand clenched and slightly lifted

See page 346

I AND MY TRUE LOVE

BY

H. A. MITCHELL KEAYS

*Author of The Road to Damascus, He That Eateth
Bread with Me, etc.*

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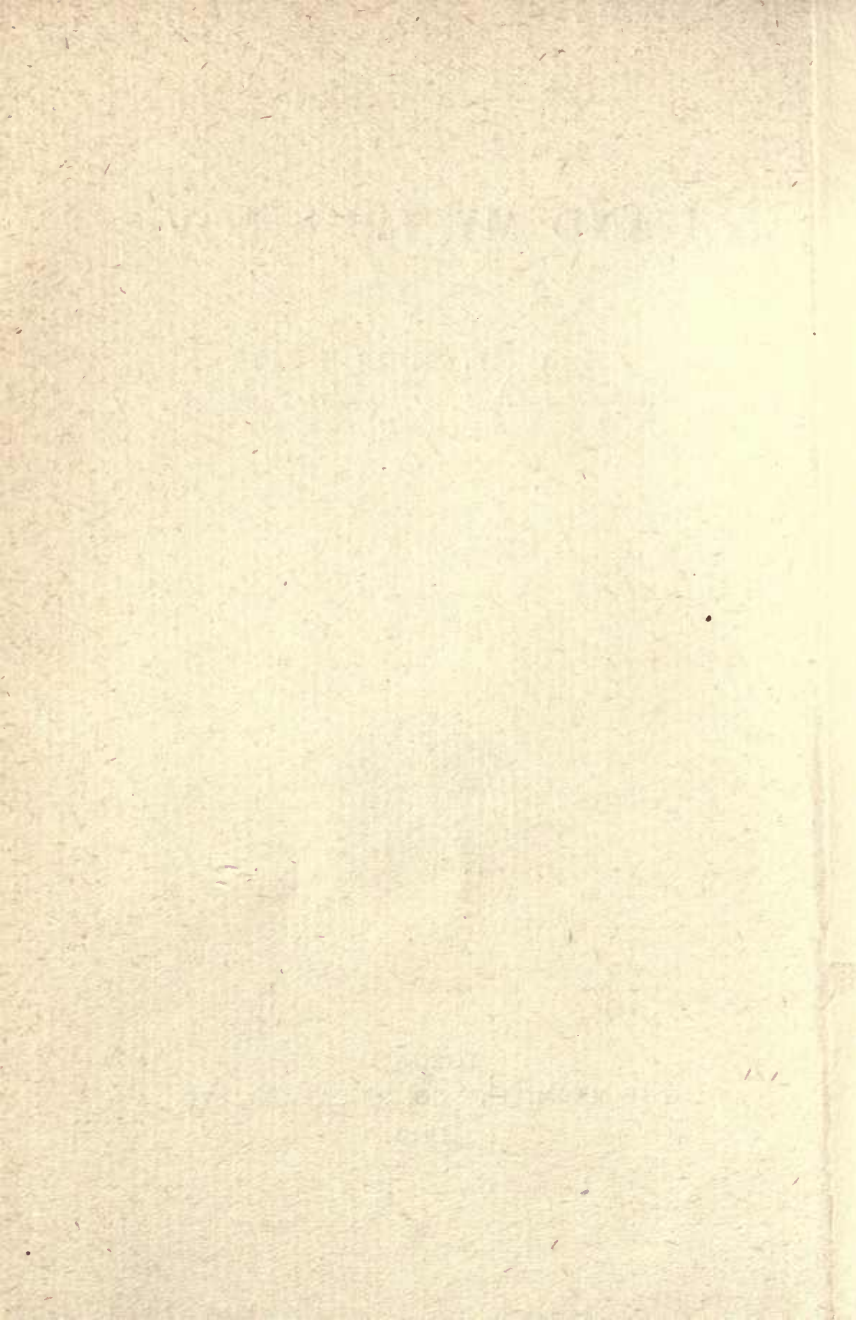
LESTER RALPH



TORONTO

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TO NAN
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THE
REMARKS OF THE

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I AND MY TRUE LOVE

I AND MY TRUE LOVE

CHAPTER I

THE PRIMROSES IN OVERSHOT WOOD

"Dear Kitty:"—

— But there Mrs. Dicky Warder stopped. It was incredible — impossible.

Yet the next moment a curious numbness succeeded the flash through all her nerves; the letter slipped from her fingers to the table, and she let it lie, her eyes not leaving those two words. Beneath the surface confusion of her thoughts, she seemed to be hearing them, repeated again and again by a voice that had no place here — in this room — in this house; a voice that saying gently, "Dear Kitty," seemed yet to be charged with antagonism — with intent to wound.

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Presently her gaze faltered from the open page to the envelope beside it. "Mrs. Warder." It looked — no! she was not going to say how it looked in *his* handwriting. It was preposterous; it was not decent. That was how it looked. And she remembered the only letter of his that she had kept out of the wreck — the first one that he had written to her after their marriage; she understood now that she had kept it with a woman's irrational clinging to the thing that she wilfully puts from her. "Mrs. Iliel Sargent." She could see it still, though she had not opened the drawer in which it had lain in all these years.

That was — twenty years ago; and yesterday — she looked at the postmark on the envelope — he had written her this letter, and had addressed it, "Mrs. Warder."

What had *he* thought?

She was motionless with that wonder for a long time; when she at last moved, it was

THE PRIMROSES

to look at herself in the mirror behind her. It did not matter what Iliel Sargent thought.

Yet all the while she was distantly conscious that she was only waiting for the moment when her pride should allow her to read his letter.

She got up and went to the window and looked out upon the avenue in its sere November dullness, and it struck her that all this fuss of living and dying was a great waste of Something that had blundered hopelessly in search of self-expression; yet when little Donny Nevil, brave in his new scarlet coat, turned the corner with his nurse, she threw open the window and called down to him: "Oh Donny darling, how is your mother this morning?"

The child looked up, his dimpled face very round and very grave. "It wasn't measles at all," he said, in a clear, precise treble. "It was a little sister. And she's very young. Mamma says she's younger than me."

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"Donny, you dear!" she crooned. "Now catch!" She threw him the fattest chocolate in the box at her elbow, and then shut the window abruptly, for Eben Gregory was coming slowly down the avenue in his car, and it crossed her mind that some day he would discover that he had come that way once too often.

She went back to the table, her eyes sweet from the sight of Donny in his scarlet coat; she loved that little boy, and, with the thought of him fortifying her, she picked up Iliel Sargent's letter and read it without a pause.

FAR END, MASS.,

November 4.

Dear Kitty:—

I want to say something to you about Christina. She was nineteen on Monday. Do you remember that when you went away and left her with me, I asked you whether you wished it to be understood that you

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washed your hands of all responsibility towards her? Your answer was that when she was a woman and needed to understand, I might send her to you. I am not sure that I know yet what you meant — the question as to you and me, or the larger one, for her, of her own life and its ways.

I may as well tell you that I never expected the time to come when I should be willing for you to do anything for my child. Yet it has. I expected to bring her up to think as I thought — to wish as I willed. But apparently there is some change in me, for I now desire her to take her own course. I want her to realize herself as a problem that has to be worked out to some dispassionate and rational solution, unless she intends to take life in a series of blunders disastrous not only to herself, but to the other person. For Christina is like her mother — there will always be the other person. He is there now, and Christina will marry him, unless

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you and I prevent it. And then she might want to unmarry him — she is her mother's child.

It is not that I do not believe in Benny Faber as a husband for her. I do. She could not have a better one. But she must find that out for herself, and that is why she must not marry him — not yet, at least.

But as she will marry, I have thought that perhaps you would give her the benefit of your judgment. I realize that I do not know what she thinks or what she wants, when it comes to the matter of men. But I think you will know.

So I ask you to take my child for a time and help her to find the way to a future in which there shall be no heartbreaks either for her, or because of her.

When may I send her to you?

Yours sincerely,

ILIEL SARGENT.

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Mrs. Dicky Warder laid the letter back upon the table; she could feel her face growing white.

But the next moment a wave of color washed red to the roots of her hair. Who ever heard of a man's writing a letter like that — and after all these years in which she had been unknown to him?

It was unthinkable that Iliel Sargent should offer his child to the woman who had left him, weary of him, weary of poverty, weary of the motherhood thrust upon her before she was out of her teens. His child indeed; she had never thought of it as hers.

"Iliel Sargent." The signature held her eyes. How simple it all was to understand now! He had married her because she was a rosebud of a girl with a troubling charm that left no man unstirred; because her soft brown hair grew low on a forehead beneath which came the warm gray eyes, and the

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lips designed since the beginning of the world to meet upon his. So he, dreamer of poetical phantasies, had dreamed.

Kitty Warder sighed. That girl — herself — twenty years ago! Of course he had loved her; there had been nothing else for him to do. And naturally, she had married him; there had been nothing else for her to do. For he had been no ordinary lover.

Remembering, there returned upon her now in all its spring-scented freshness the morning when she had seen him coming towards her along the English lane, its high hedges shutting them in and all the rest of the world out. She could feel again the beat of the girl's heart, and the tremor that shook her body like the wind of the dawn through an eager string, and then, because she could not go a step farther, she had turned, and begun to look for violets where none grew.

“ See — ” it was his voice beside her — “ I

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have brought you these. I got them in Overshot Wood."

She took the primroses from him — she could smell them now, and something in her shrank as from the fear of a stirring wound — but she could say nothing to him; she could only look at him, and think how tall he was, and broad and fair, and quiver again, as she felt without understanding the mute call of his lips to hers.

Then: "Kitty!" he had cried suddenly — and her hands were in his.

"My primroses!" she answered, as he crushed them closer.

"Primroses!" he echoed. "Aren't there a million more for you in Overshot Wood?"

"No," she said swiftly. "There will never be any more like these in any wood."

That was where the story should have ended. But marriage on the love-in-a-cottage income followed, and then the round of days in a little house in a little American vil-

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lage, with no escape from the sordid details of cheap living. It was true that Iliel remained the lover, and worked at his precarious trade of literature with feverish perception of his responsibilities as a married man. But the lover as lover and as husband were not quite the same; Mrs. Warder remembered with quick pity how the young wife had remained a mute and bewildered instrument at the strange touch of passion, and the boy husband had not understood, his own content being probably sufficient unto itself in those early days.

And then the baby came, and against that day and night there was set in Kitty Sargent's memory a mark of horror. She was pathetically young and rebellious, and not afraid to question the things that yield a stone for bread in the answering. She did not want that baby; oh perhaps, some day, but not then! She hated pain and discom-

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fort, and what appeared to her the coarse service demanded of her for the child. She speedily decided that the joys of love were open to suspicion in their adjustment to the woman,—too generously apportioned to her by a sardonic Creator and Dispenser of the privileges of sex.

Iliel of course worked hard, but he was doing the thing he liked to do and had chosen to do, and he had his bodily freedom. She would never have hers again; there would always be a child to bear or to nourish, or to care for in some distasteful way.

She was not without love for her baby, but she grew to feel that both it and she were victims. What was the use of being young and charming with no one by to dream back into her eyes her own sweetness? Iliel had ceased inventing new ways of telling her that she was adored; all that he had once said to her he now put on paper, and though he

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read it to her very interestingly, she found it less satisfying to be used as a model for heroines than she could have foreseen.

And then Dicky Warder came — Iliel's college chum who was spending the summer at Looking-Glass Lake with his affluent aunt. As the good lady owned most of the land to be seen, east, west, north, and south of the four walls of Looking-Glass Lodge, it followed that the neighborhood offered little in the way of immediate entertainment according to Dicky Warder's kind, and with the best intentions in the world towards his prospects, he had to own to himself that they were likely to be the death of him if no adventure occurred to relieve the dullness of days that began with cribbage and ended with more cribbage.

But the devil had always had a soft spot in his heart for Dicky Warder. And so it happened that, as the young man drove through Far End one warm July afternoon,

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he came upon Iliel Sargent. And Iliel, desperately anxious to exhibit his prize, took Dicky to the little home that was so frail a guard for it.

After that there were no more dull days for anyone, and Iliel rejoiced that he need no longer feel importuned to seek diversions for Kitty. Warder was always in and out, so lightly and so naturally, and Kitty had never been sweeter, and the long hours of work never swifter. They fell into the habit of driving in the early evenings — she and Dicky on the front seat, and he behind, resting and dreaming. Dreaming — that was it.

Mrs. Warder got up and walked to the window again, and looked up and down the wintry avenue; in this moment she wanted to escape from the memories that long training had forbidden to her, but which to-day were pressing upon her like pointed swords.

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Dicky Warder? — no, she would not think of some things. She never had, since that last hour, when with struggling breath he had said to her: “Do you love me?” and she had answered: “Yes,” and then waited, frightened, until he spoke again. “You lie well, Kitty,” he said, and with the little smile she dreaded, he closed his eyes.

That was five years ago.

She could not escape thinking. She had to remember, and with a sudden rush of tears to eyes that had known few, she whispered: “You were cruel to me, Dicky.”

That afternoon she went to see Mrs. Nevil and the little sister that was younger than Donny. Usually she shrank from babies, conscious of herself as unfemininely alien to them. But to-day she said to the nurse: “May I have her?”—and when she had the tiny thing across her knees she looked at it so long and so strangely that at last Mrs.

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Nevil said: "Kitty, what *are* you thinking?"

Mrs. Warder gave back the child abruptly to the nurse. "Oh, so many, many things," she said with a little laugh: "about babies, and why they come, and what they mean."

Mrs. Nevil was puzzled. "I suppose it's the women who don't have them who philosophize about them. Kitty, didn't you ever want a baby?" She looked wistfully at the friend to whom she told almost everything, and who told her so little.

"A baby? Yes — once." There was a swift change in Mrs. Warder's face. "I saw one in the street — there was something about it — I wondered if I had looked like that when I was a baby. Oh, all sorts of things, and I flew home, and Dicky found me crying, and I couldn't tell him why, but he made me. He wasn't pleased. He said that I and my beauty were worth a hundred

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children to the world — I was never to be marred by any child."

"Oh! Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Nevil deeply.

"Yes. He said I was never to speak to him of that again. I said I never would, and when he was gone, I looked at myself in the glass, and then — I smashed it — that mirror. I hated it. The woman I saw in it was a manufactured creature."

"Kitty darling!" Mrs. Nevil's face flushed hotly.

"Oh Sally, I mustn't talk to you like this. The nurse will be putting me out."

Mrs. Nevil shook her head. "I like to hear you talk like that," she said with a touch of shyness. "You don't often get serious, Kitty."

Late that night Mrs. Warder sent a letter to the post. The words of it were brief:

"You may send Christina to me. When shall I expect her?"

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Then she read Iliel's letter through again, suddenly ravaged by a passion to know what manner of man he had become. For she discerned that he was no longer of the simply woven fabric that had composed the nature of the boy whom she had loved and wedded, and so lightly left. Of course not; he was Iliel Sargent the successful playwright now, and the man of the world, as much the man of the world in his way as Dicky Warder had been in his.

The thought of the girl, held aloof through the long hours of this troubling day, forced its way in past the guards she had set against it, and waited silently, until in self-defence she began to argue her case with this unknown daughter. What did the girl know of her? What had she been brought up to believe about her mother?

It did not matter; she could meet the child unashamed. She had not sinned against Iliel Sargent; she had left him with no stain

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upon her. She had remained in exile from Warder until she was honorably free to marry him. But she remembered that in that time she had lived upon his letters — those letters that he had made her bring to him and then burn, soon after their marriage. They had served their purpose, he told her, and there came a time when she understood what he had meant. For by every device known to a connoisseur of that art in which the least subtle and the dullest pulsed of men is, at some moment in his life, an artist divinely or diabolically endowed, those letters were written with the intent of suffusing a girl's unconscious passion with elements well calculated to pique the taste of a young man of exclusive preferences.

Mrs. Warder put out the light and turned to her bed. It was no use; she was not ready to sleep yet. The thoughts that she had kept under restraint for five years were

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leaping at her like hounds torn loose from an outworn leash; she could no longer protect the name of the man who had been her husband from the gall of her memories. Her life with him stood out before her appraised at his own valuation of it. Dicky Warder had been no novice in the art of love like Iliel Sargent. From the moment of their marriage he had treated his wife as an exquisitely strung instrument from which passion should evoke for him the most passionately varied confession, but with the most delicately rhythmic accent. And yet to her memory nothing could be more flagitious than the training she had received from the man who, in a week, had silently defined his possession of her to be that of the master. She obeyed him, because of her fear of him, and because there seemed to be nothing else to do. In a year she had grown dependent upon the luxuries of her position; it was but

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natural that she should shrink from the thought of any life less sumptuously ministrant to her ease.

Her face burnt now as she recalled his remark made to her when he declared himself finally satisfied with the panther-like grace of her carriage — the grace he had spent hours in patiently developing and directing: “No man could ever see you walk without wanting to take you in his arms.”

It was the only time he was betrayed into indiscreet admission of his point of view. And his ideals for her being what they were, it was small wonder that he was annoyed by her desire to have a child. “That is the best use to which most women can be put,” he told her. “Women like you, of whom there are few enough in a generation, are not meant for service as instruments of race perpetuation.”

“What am I meant for then?” she had demanded rebelliously.

But he had declined to discuss that, and

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then, after he had left her, she looked at herself in the glass — at the curve of the bosom which ached for the face of a child against it — and smashed the glass. For she understood, for the first time, that she was no wife, but a man's mistress.

Iliel Sargent and the child that had been hers were never mentioned between her and Dicky Warder; she had soon discovered that that part of her life must be as if it never had been.

Now, as she sat alone in the darkness, a thrill of joy went through her that at last she possessed herself — that she was owned by no man. She realized that she had endured an experience such as scorches few women, but she had come out of it curiously unscathed; she was still able to approach her own purity in reverence.

And in strange, sudden confusion of impulse, she wished that Iliel Sargent could know that.

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Yet the next moment swept her back to the mood in which she had begun the day. It was impossible — outrageous! That girl Christina — she must not come. Iliel Sargent should have known better than to ask such a thing; it was unfair; it was not decent.

He had always been an unreasonable man — clearly he was so still.

Had he always been unreasonable?

She shook the thought from her. Tomorrow she would write again, and explain, as he did not seem to understand, that in the circumstances it was not possible for her to receive his daughter. He had flaunted the expression *my child* in his letter; let him keep his child!

In that mood she fell asleep.

CHAPTER II

THE MANSION HOUSE

Conditions had changed since the days when Iliel Sargent set up housekeeping with his young wife "over on the North Side" of Far End. For many years now he had lived on the West Side, in what was locally known as the Mansion House, and as his circumstances progressed through the various stages of increasing ease towards affluence, he had carefully restored the old place to its original simplicity. It had been built three-quarters of a century before by a man of his own blood, and Sargent had in his possession a letter written by his mother when she had visited there in her girlhood, in which for the entertainment of her family, she described minutely the house and its furnishings. With its aid

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he had been able to call back the beauty of the early days; even the rose-jars in the drawing-room were back in their old place on either side of the great black marble mantelpiece, from which there had been scraped many layers of the white paint laid on to appease the artistic sensibilities of the last tenant—a lady whose ideas of “art” were derived from the household magazine which nourished her intellect and provided patterns for her clothes. The amazing wall-paper was replaced by one of “palest lavender tone with a smooth satin finish”—as his mother had described it; and at the many windows hung curtains of plain white silk. The rug that covered the floor matched the walls in color, and scattered upon it were enormous roses in a faintly deeper shade of lavender with delicate green leaves and stems. The room was a witness to the best in Early Victorian decoration, and many mornings, before his day’s work began, Iliel Sargent spent a

THE MANSION HOUSE

few minutes there, ministered to by its homely charm; he loved to feel the glow of the old mahogany against the low key of color that served to bring out all the secrets of the wood; he had searched far and patiently for the chairs and the table and the adroitly curved sofa which one and another of the villagers had bought at the auction sale thirty years before. They were not all there yet, but he knew where they were, and he cherished in himself a belief that they were decreed one day to return. But he discovered early in his search that he had to employ a variety of means if he would secure the return of erstwhile family possessions; money unadorned was not enough. There was that pretty Mrs. Dryder — she had all the furniture belonging to one of the bed-rooms and refused to part with it at any price. But that was only after she had permitted him to call upon her countless times in regard to it, always insisting upon his going up-stairs to

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look at it; the carving on the four bed-posts was elaborate, and she particularly liked him to observe that there was not a speck of dust in any cranny.

"And I couldn't, Mr. Sargent — I couldn't intrust the care of that furniture to anyone but myself, and yet it's the dearest wish of my heart to see it where it belongs in the Mansion House."

Sargent looked at her and muttered blankly, "I'm sure you're very kind, Mrs. Dryder," and walked home, a wise if not a willing man.

Yet why should he be unwilling? He had to admit that he had found his calls upon the lady very entertaining; the little woman had a great deal of charm in a bird-like, coquettish way, and she came of a family as good as his own. He wished that she had not put that marrying idea into his head. It was strange that after all these years in which the lure of marriage had been the least of his

THE MANSION HOUSE

temptations he should be assailed now by annoying visions of its possibilities — by direct thoughts of a pretty wife in the Mansion House. Yet it was easily explained, he assured himself. Christina had suddenly grown up; she would surely marry and leave him to the starvation pangs of life alone with Cousin Belle, the best and most devoted of house-keeping women. Christina was such a darling, such a dainty flower of a girl, such an appealing, joyously pathetic realization of all a man's dreams of maidenhood, from the crown of her willful head to the tip of her adored little foot; Christina, with her ribbons and her furbelows and her laces and her perfumes, and her saucy caprices and reprehensible extravagance of mood and conduct. To him the Mansion House was a frame for her; when he had married it had been with the determination that it should one day be a frame for his wife; to that end he had slaved at his work while she played through a sum-

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mer with Dicky Warder. When the next summer came he remembered his dreams with curses for his blindness; but the years passed, and Christina grew out of babyhood into girlhood, and he began to dream again, and the most fiercely happy day of his life came when he led his little daughter into the home he had intended for her mother.

And now when he sat in the great drawing-room and watched her flitting about, filling the vases with flowers, he was content; he wanted nothing more. She had grown up in the setting he had desired for her; the poetry of the old place — her room, the same that his mother had occupied, with its quaint chintz hangings, its dainty dressing-table with the heart-shaped mirror that seemed made only to reflect a girl's face; the garden, where the old-time flowers grew, hollyhocks and love-lies-bleeding and heavy scented pinks; and beyond the stone wall, the orchard, where to-day the blossoms blew and

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to-morrow the fruit gleamed palely green among the greener leaves, or blushed ripe and red for winter's storing — the poetry of all these things had entered richly into Christina's life, and had done, each its part, in making her the rare creature that she was — a creature of the winter's snows and the summer's winds, with the tinted breath of wild-roses on her lips and the purpled blue of the wayside gentian in her eyes. There was nothing of her mother in her looks; in that respect she was simon-pure Sargent.

But there was everything of her mother in her temperament; wise student of men and women that he had become, her father met and acknowledged that fact, and determined to make the best of the situation for his daughter.

It was in pursuit of this determination that he had written to Mrs. Dicky Warder the letter that she found so disturbing; perhaps her answer, which he perceived on the top of

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his pile of letters when he went into his "workshop" on the morning of the sixth of November, produced a flash of the nerves in him, even though he was expecting it. But he set it aside and dictated the day's answers to his correspondence to his secretary, Miss Maroline Spence.

"Why Maroline?" he had asked briefly when he engaged her.

"Names of my grandmothers — Mary, Caroline," she had explained a trifle wearily. "Parents disagreed. Compromised on Maroline."

He had looked at her doubtfully, reflecting that the uninitiated man would probably pronounce her a business-like and unsentimental person. But he had had experience with all kinds, and as it always had been, so it proved to be in this case. He had begun by dismissing them for it, but now he hardened his heart and endured it that Miss Spence's pas-

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sion for him should nourish itself upon her own devotion to his service.

After he had disposed of his business letters and warded off a conversation he had seen forming itself for days upon Miss Spence's flat-nosed countenance, he picked up Mrs. Warder's note — opened and read it — put it back in its envelope, and took it to a secretaire and shut it away in a drawer. Then he settled himself in the chair in which he always sat when he wrote, and plunged into the last act of his play — the act for which Harriet Winship, the actress cast for the leading lady's part, had been clamoring this month past.

To-day he was suddenly aware of a passionate interest in the act; he wrote vehemently, exulting in the consciousness that he was doing unusual work. He was driven by a feverish desire to get himself down while he was in this mood.

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But at half-past four that afternoon there came an imperious knock on the door, and then Christina's voice. "Father, I'm coming in. I am."

"Well —" he answered weakly, and threw on the floor the last page of the act at which he had been staring vacantly for longer than he knew.

Christina came in. She was carrying a tea-tray for which she cleared a space on the floor with her foot, as there was not a spare inch on table or chair, and then she sank down beside it, and began to pour tea and talk with equal precipitation.

"I've had *such* a day."

"You always do," he murmured between two bites at a muffin.

She looked at him disapprovingly. "When I found you weren't going to walk to Looking-Glass Lake with me —"

"I couldn't," he protested. "I had to

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write to-day. The fourth act of *The Fire Fools* is done."

"Done!" she echoed. "I really think I ought to sit on your knee for that."

"There'll be an awful collision of tea-cups if you do," he said anxiously. "Perhaps you'd wait a little."

"You will," she retorted. "You're the only man I know who holds off my offers. But as you've finished your fourth act I'll let that pass."

"Thanks. But tell me what you've been up to."

"Well — lunching with Mrs. Dryder for one thing."

"With Mrs. Dryder?"

"Yes." Christina eyed her parent speculatively. "I'm afraid you've been flirting awfully with her."

"Tina!" But Sargent blushed slightly.

"She does too," said Christina, pinching

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Sargent's cheek. "Very becomingly if you're not his daughter."

"Now, Tina, you know —"

"Everything." Christina's tone was blandness itself. "She thought she was pumping me, but I extracted from that helpless woman her most secret hopes and fears. I couldn't help doing it, father. She overdid the innocent so awfully to begin with, and told me so many things just to have me tell them to you, and I really can't be used that way without doing my little part too. She's really all right, you know. She's just a bit silly for the time."

Sargent nodded.

Christina got up from the floor and came and stood beside him. "I'm not going to tell you anything more about her. And you're to be nice to her in a careful way."

"You think —" began Sargent slowly.

"No, I don't," said Christina, "but so long as she can never have anything more, I

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think she might as well be happy with her silly dreams. You're a perfect fit for that kind of thing."

Sargent laughed and drew the girl down beside him, and after she had kissed him a great many times she put her hands on his shoulders and looked at him gravely.

"This marrying business is a nuisance," she said.

"Oh, I don't know." Sargent spoke lightly and blew a ring of smoke over his shoulder.

"Well, I do, and you ought to. And you would if you had Benny Faber on your mind the way I have."

"Take him off it."

"That's just it. I'm going to."

"Oh!" exclaimed Sargent.

Christina looked at him critically. "I wonder what that 'Oh!' means. I suppose you would like me to marry Benny."

Sargent got up and set Christina on a pile

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of books on the table. She was such a diminutive, decorative thing that the big man had a habit of perching her about wherever she appeared most effective.

But he was not thinking of that now. "Tina!" he exclaimed almost violently, "do you think that the father who is fit to be called father ever wants his daughter to marry *any* man?"

"Oh!" said Christina, in a tone so exact a repetition of Sargent's a few moments before that they both laughed. Then she added: "Don't you see, father? Benny's the only one. And that won't do. I want them to fall in love with me by the dozen. But the trouble is, where are the dozen? Not in Far End, certainly."

"No," said Sargent slowly; "not in Far End."

He stood looking at her. And she sat on her pile of books, looking at him, her adored



“DON’T you see, father?—Benny’s the only one. And that won’t do. I want them to fall in love with me by the dozen”

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little feet swaying under the table and out again.

Suddenly she cried out. "Father, don't stare at me like that! Aren't you happy about me? What have I done?"

"Come, we must get ready for dinner," he said. And lifting her on his shoulder he carried her up-stairs to the door of her room.

CHAPTER III

MADAM KITTY'S DAUGHTER

"You see, I've been thinking, Tina."

Christina looked up from the absurd garment she was making for the gardener's last and most superfluous baby. "I'd be careful about that. It might become a habit."

"Not this sort." Sargent hesitated. "Because — it's true, Tina — what you said. You don't see a man from one month's end to another that you can try your young affections on."

"Oh! — *that!*"

"Yes — *that*. But it's rather serious after all. I've thought about it a great deal more than you have."

"Then you do want me to get married!"

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"I don't," declared Sargent stormily.
"But you will."

"Oh yes, I shall," assented Christina easily. "That's why I'd like to have a little choice, and not have to take Benny Faber just because I loved him, and there was nobody else."

"You think you love Benny?" demanded her father, staring at her. He was often staggered by the ease with which she appropriated the great experiences as her own.

"Think I love him!" she flashed.

"Then why—I'm rather in the dark, Tina."

"I don't see why," said Christina slowly. "Some things are hard to explain. You see—Madam Kitty loved you, father."

Sargent was silent.

"Didn't she?" insisted Christina.

"She thought so," he admitted. He had to; he was remembering Overshot Wood.

"Well, that's it, you see, father. That's

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what troubles me. Loving doesn't seem as sure as you'd think it would, and as everybody pretends it is. Does it?" She leaned forward and made him look at her.

"Little girl, I don't know."

"But you ought to know, father. You've had a long time to think about it."

"I?" He waited. "That doesn't help. I know less about it, child, perhaps, than you do."

She was silent a while, looking at him as if she saw him in a new light. Then she said: "Some people are sure. Some of them fall in love and get married and stay married, and they are happy. You remember that little Mrs. Symons we met when we were in Switzerland — that Englishwoman. She talked to me about the silly boy who made such awful love to me."

"What boy?" demanded Sargent.

"Oh, never mind, father. I didn't, but I

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think she got afraid I might. She didn't understand my way with a man — that was all. She took everything that had anything to do with love so seriously, but after I had convinced her, she talked to me about marriage in quite a lovely way. Her idea was that you fell beautifully in love and then lived or died all the rest of your life just for that man. I liked to hear her talk, but of course I wasn't going to keep still forever, and one day I said that marriage could only be an experiment no matter how much falling in love you had done beforehand. She asked me what I meant, and I told her that I supposed the chances of good luck were about even, and that if you made a marriage that turned out all wrong, you must just be sensible and get out of it as quietly and comfortably as possible and hope for better cards next time. My! but she was shocked. She let fly at me, and I've never forgotten some

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of the things she said. She had such a — well, a sort of sacred idea about the whole thing. It was rather nice.”

Christina waited, watching her father.

“Some people have that way of looking at it, Tina.”

“Madam Kitty didn’t.”

“No, Madam Kitty didn’t.”

“And you’ve always told me that you didn’t blame her, father — that she did nothing wrong — that she did the only sensible thing there was to do, and — and all that.”

“Yes.”

“Well —” Christina threw down the little garment and got up and stood close to him — “is that what you believe — now — when I want to know?”

Sargent got up too. “Tina, don’t ask me things like that! Madam Kitty was perfectly honorable — there was nothing else for her to do. She was your mother, Tina, and —”

“But, father —”

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He came over to her and laid his fingers across her lips.

“Child, don't!” he said.

For in this moment he understood himself as in all these years he had never done. He understood that all his wisdom, all his cooled-on-ice philosophy of life had been but as a sophistical veil that he had woven to hide his wound from his own eyes. To-night, for the first time, he understood just what it had meant to him when his wife went her way, and left him and his child to go theirs.

But he had had twenty years' discipline in his philosophical creed, and though he was suffering in a way new and strange, his belief as to what was due to his wife and his daughter did not waver. He realized that his ideals for his own conduct were quixotic — reprehensible, many good people would consider them. They seemed almost that to himself in this crisis, but that was just why he meant to adhere to them. For they were the fruit

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of years of suffering and of unflinching study of himself and his kind, and now, because he was tempted by the desire to doubt them, he would be true to them.

“I am going to tell you something, Tina,” he began at last. “It is what I have been thinking about. How would you like to go and stay with Madam Kitty for a while?”

Christina’s lips parted; for a moment she said nothing; then she asked: “With Madam Kitty?”

“Yes.” He tried to speak lightly. “Why not? To see the world as a woman of it sees it—to meet the men a woman in it meets—to get the big view—to be able to make comparisons.”

“Father!” cried the girl. “What do you mean?” Her young thinking eyes were keen on his face. “Besides,” she added swiftly, “Madam Kitty—I don’t believe she’d want me.”

“She does.”

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"How do you know?"

"She says so."

"Have you seen her, then?" There was resentment in the quick question.

"No. She wrote to me."

"Where is her letter? Had you written to her?"

"Yes."

"Without telling me?"

"Yes."

"Father!" She was in a flame. "You had no right to do that — to write to her about me without — without —"

"My child, she is your mother."

"She's nothing to me, father, and you know she isn't. I've lived all my life without her. I don't want to know her now. I won't."

"Come here!" he said. And melted, she flew to him, and perched on the arm of his chair and laid her head against his, and let herself be comforted and coaxed, and waxed

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so sweet in her love for him that Sargent could have groaned.

But he only said: "I will explain to you, little girl. You see, it's like this — you're Madam Kitty's daughter as much as you are mine. There is as much of her character in yours as there is of mine. I think there's more, Tina."

"No, no!" she protested. But he held her still.

"And some day — perhaps five, ten years from now — that might come out, in such a way that it would hurt you, darling, when it shouldn't hurt you at all, if we are only wise and patient. I've thought it all out. It has taken me a long time. I want to give your mother's temperament its rights now — not afterwards when there might, perhaps, be others to hurt. I want you to know your mother. I want you to come into the closest contact with what she thinks and does. I want you to understand her attitude towards

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life and to make up your mind about it — whether it is right or wrong or neither. She is a woman of the world. They say she is clever — that she knows life better than most women.” He paused, and then added: “She must; she couldn’t escape that. Well, that is it, Tina. I want her to tell you what she knows and what she thinks about it. Child —” he put her off his chair; it seemed as if he could not endure her sweet nearness so soon to be gone from him. And she stood, looking at him, with something of the mystery of his sorrows in her eyes — “child, I have been so afraid. I have wanted not to do this. I have wanted to keep you all to myself. But that isn’t fair to you. Some day, when you can understand, I want you to be able to see that your father was faithful to you in a hard place. And if what I have taught you of life is true, it will stand. If it is not true, I want it to go. Some of it will anyway. Little girl —” he caught her

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to him in sudden passion, in desperate need of her tender woman's understanding — "little girl, do you see that it will never be again for us as it has been until to-day? — that it will never again be just you and I?"

She clung to him. "Father, don't make me go. Don't! I don't want to. I won't!"

"It's written," he said, with a sudden, whimsical smile. And neither tears nor protests brought another serious word from him that night.

CHAPTER IV

THE PINE TREES ON SUNSET HILL

“I’m rather troubled, Iliel,” said Cousin Belle as she carefully folded a skirt to fit into Christina’s trunk. “It seems to me there’s something I ought to say and I don’t want to say it.”

“Then you know how sorry you’ll be afterwards,” said Sargent. “One more duty left undone, and never again the chance to do it, in all eternity.”

He had wandered into his daughter’s room with the feeling that he must set foot within it once again, while the breath of her young life was still warm in it — before her step had vanished from it and the shades were drawn and the door closed upon what had become for her the past.

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Cousin Belle smiled gently. "Of course you're laughing at me, Iliel. I don't wonder."

She was a small-sized woman of fifty, with a figure which was a spiritual stumbling-block to her of no mean proportions; she could not resist thanking God for it every time she looked in the glass, and feeling pity for less favored women — notably Miss Spence. In her purest moments she was aware that her gratitude to her Maker and her sympathy for Miss Spence were but subterfuges to cloak her unholy satisfaction in a matter of mere carnal endowment.

She had been used to hearing her face spoken of as "homely" when she was a girl, and had therefore early made up her mind to forget that she had a face, which perhaps accounted for its sweetness and simplicity of expression. Her brown hair streaked with gray had pretty little kinks in it that she sought to conquer by strenuous brushing, with

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results that were a humiliation to a woman of serious character.

Sargent sat down in Christina's rocking-chair — it was the one concession to modernity in the room.

“Laughing at you? Of course I'm laughing at you. I've been doing that for — nearly twenty years, haven't I?”

Cousin Belle nodded. “But, Iliel, you do know, don't you? that I believe that there is nothing real but the life of the spirit, and that we are one with God — all of us — whether we believe it or not, and that in Him there can be nothing evil.”

“Well?” said Sargent as she paused; he was actuated by a desire to keep her from condoling with him by occupying her with her own mental processes.

“Well — but, Iliel, how can you let that dear child go —” she drew herself up bravely — “into what seems to us to be evil?”

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Sargent had in his hand a little slipper that he had picked out of the corner into which it had been tossed.

“What an absurd thing!” he said, balancing it on his finger.

Cousin Belle looked at him and shook her head; she adored her big, well-favored man relative, and loyally endeavored to discover spiritual meanings in his untimely flippancies, but it was sometimes hard to do so.

“Please, Iliel —” she began again, and then stopped, for Sargent was looking at her with the directness that always frightened her.

“You are sure that Madam Kitty is evil?” he asked.

“Oh Iliel, as to that —” she faltered, in her perturbation nearly sitting backwards into the trunk.

“As to that,” he repeated. “Then let us put it this way. Could you imagine yourself doing as she did?”

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“ Iliel ! ”

“ Of course not. And neither can I imagine Madam Kitty doing as you have so unselfishly done all these years in my house — packing trunks, and preserving fruit, and checking the bills, and all the rest of it. It’s a matter of predestination of character, my dear Belle. The wrong, if there was any, was mine in mistaking the destination of Madam Kitty’s. But we adjusted that error, thus making way for you in your predestined place here.”

“ Yes — yes,” murmured Cousin Belle. There surely were many ways of looking at a thing.

“ And as for evil — ” Sargent’s tone changed — “ I am sending my little girl out into the world — as we call it — as if she hadn’t always been in it — to find out the good in it and the good in herself. And she will find it. She will find it, Cousin Belle.”

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He got up and went out of the room before Cousin Belle had readjusted her mind to a new point of view; Iliel talked so unexpectedly of things you supposed he never thought of. He was a child of God, of course, but a most unconscious and inconsistent one. She had really been troubled to hear him reading the last act of *The Fire Fools* to Christina before luncheon; a line from the Bible in one breath, and in the next a joke at which they both shouted. Certainly the dear child had had strange training.

It did not occur to Cousin Belle at this moment to remember that she was herself considered a most inconsistent child of God by her consciously consistent fellow Christians in Far End. For here was a woman of unimpeachable integrity of daily life, who not only said that Romanists and Baptists and Presbyterians were equally necessary manifestations of Divine truth, or they would not

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exist, but who acted as if she believed it in ways that made the reproofs she deserved very difficult to administer. When the O'Meara boy was burnt to death, she knelt for hours with his mother before the shrine of the Virgin in Saint Patrick's, and when she came away her face had upon it the effulgence of one who believed that she had delivered to the especial care of the Mother of Sorrows a daughter who had sore need of her.

As soon as he felt that she had had time to recover from the excitement of a distressing occasion, Cousin Belle's own minister called upon her and talked to her in a kindly but faithful way of the sin of Mariolatry, and she listened to him and said "Yes, yes" when she thought yes, and nothing when she thought no.

But as she shook hands with him she looked up with a flash in her face.

"I still believe in the Virgin Mary," she said sweetly.

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“What do you mean by that?” he asked helplessly.

“I don’t know. But I know she was a great comfort to Nora O’Meara.”

“But that’s utterly irrational,” he said, more helplessly than before.

“I suppose so.” She nodded and smiled and shut the door softly, as he seemed to have nothing ready to say.

The Reverend Austin Brown went home to write a sermon on the faith that was once delivered to the saints — meaning Presbyterianism. But as he wrote he began to be troubled by the vision of a hewn and painted figure such as he had seen in his foreign wanderings — a figure at whose feet men and women knelt in devotion, a great host of them, the poor, the ignorant, the betrayed, the condemned.

The Nora O’Mearas and all the rest of them — what was there in the religion he had to offer them to fill the place in their

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sorrows of this Mary, whose face was the face of Cousin Belle?

He went on with his sermon, but it grew illogical, as if it were being written, not for the elect in the pews, but for the outcast and the deserted whose feet bled upon the byways of despair. And it occurred to him strangely that hitherto he had regarded them merely as theological illustrations to his text.

Cousin Belle finished packing Christina's trunk very slowly; it was a labor of love; she thought caressingly of the girl in each garment as she folded it and smoothed it into place. When she heard the clang of the front door and the rush of Christina's footsteps in the hall below she ran to the head of the stairs and said: "I'm up here, dear. Let's have our tea in your room — your father won't be in until dinner."

"All right," caroled Christina, and to the sounds of many scramblings and much laughter, she appeared, followed by Kad, her little

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Yorkshire terrier, who lived with his eyes fixed on the face of his mistress.

"I've been over to say good-by to the Fabers," she said, as she threw off her coat and hat. "Mrs. Faber said, 'Poor child!' and asked me when I had heard from Benny and what he thought, and Mr. Faber said that Benny said that the man at the head of the Survey was a damned fool —"

"Tina!"

"But he did, Cousin Belle. And that if things weren't managed better, Benny would resign, and I said, Oh no, he wouldn't—that he'd stick to the job until the job quit him. And Mr. Faber said, You bet he would—that no one ever knew Benny Faber to back down, not after he'd once set his mind to a thing. They're such dears, Cousin Belle. It always makes me sort of homesick for Benny when I see them. And he won't be back for a whole year, and by then as like as not, I'll be 'wooded and won and

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married and a'—" Her voice trailed off into a murmur of demi-semi quavering.

"Tina, you won't!" protested Cousin Belle. "You know that Benny believes that you are going to marry him, and you know that you are, and that there isn't another boy like Benny in this whole world."

"Of course there isn't," agreed Christina disconsolately. "That's the awful thing about it."

Cousin Belle handed her a cup of tea with a severe expression.

"Do you ever tell Benny that maybe you won't marry him after all?"

"Tell him that! I shouldn't dare to. Benny's grown up believing we're to get married as soon as ever we could. It's awful!" Christina went to the window and looked out; light snowflakes were beginning to fall and her mind went back to the winter afternoons when Benny used to come to take her coasting down Sunset Hill. They would walk

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home together in the early darkness hand in hand, and Benny would talk of the big things the world was waiting for him to do. He had begun doing some of them at college, but in so simple and unspectacular a way that it took some people a long time to find out that in reality Benny was a very spectacular person.

The snowflakes fell, faster and faster, just as they used to fall, but Benny was gone, and to-morrow she would be gone; there was to be for them no more coasting on Sunset Hill and no walk home in the dusk with Kad and Cardinal rushing madly out of sight along the winding road, and then back again with gasping breath and red tongues lapping the frosty air.

Christina sighed. Those were nice days — free of all the tiresome complications that had arisen since it had become apparent that Benny really intended to marry her, and that, perhaps, uncomfortably soon. Of course she

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loved him; how could you do anything else? — Benny, with his beautiful face — you couldn't call Benny's face anything but beautiful — and his dark, thick, crisply turned hair. His face was as square and determined looking as his figure, but his gray eyes and his mouth — oh everything sweet and wise and everlasting as the hills was in them!

“ Oh *dear!* ” she said aloud, and sat down, and held out her cup to be filled again. “ You see, Cousin Belle, the trouble is, Benny doesn't understand. Or else he won't — perhaps that's it. He insists upon taking it for granted that I'm just as crazy to marry him as he is to marry me. He talks as if marriage were Paradise — as if the sun and the moon and the stars and all created things had been designed since the beginning of Time just to get us married to each other.”

“ Bless him! ” ejaculated Cousin Belle.

“ That's all foolishness,” said Christina decidedly. “ Benny thinks when you're

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married you're caught up into a golden cloud and live in it ever after. But I know that you come down to earth bump a year later, if not eleven months and twenty-nine days sooner. The trouble is that Benny doesn't know me at all since I've grown up and begun to think."

Cousin Belle laughed softly. "My dear, very much grown-up women like you may like to think they think all they want to think they think, but in the long run they do the same old thing that women always have been doing with very little thinking and a vast amount of feeling."

"Oh, I dare say. Now, if I were thirty—" Christina gazed reflectively at the absurd red slippers on her bits of feet — "why, if I were thirty, of course, I'd marry Benny tomorrow."

"Why?"

"Cousin Belle, when you're thirty —"

"As to that, I'm not sure," said Cousin

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Belle rather loftily. "There are women of fifty —" she was thinking of the minister, for in spite of her simplicity, she was femininely aware that the Reverend Austin Brown's interest in the purity of her theological beliefs was not primarily a matter of ecclesiastical devotion on his part. He thought it was, of course.

There had been a time when she had strongly disapproved of the remarriage of the bereaved, but that was — well, some time ago. Dear Mrs. Brown had been dead these ten years — that was a long while, and surely made a difference. People changed a great deal in ten years — she knew that she had. Mr. Brown was probably hardly the same person that he was when his poor wife died. And she had been ill for years before her death; that made it seem even more "different."

"I suppose so," said Christina vaguely. "But there can't be much fun in it."

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Cousin Belle blushed. That was all the dear child knew.

Christina looked at her critically. "Cousin Belle, do you know that you are getting to be a pretty woman. Father said so the other day."

"Oh, my dear!" Cousin Belle's tone deprecated, but her dimple exulted.

"Yes, you are," Christina ruminated. "Madam Kitty's pretty, isn't she?"

"She's lovely. At least, she was." Cousin Belle's expression implied that even to the Scarlet Woman she would be just.

"It's a great thing to be a pretty woman." Christina looked wise. "It really means that you can do anything you like."

"Maybe it does," said Cousin Belle, in a tone strongly marked by a preserving sense of Christian charity—she never thought of Madam Kitty if she could help it—"and ten chances to one what you like is a very wrong thing to like."

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"That's what I want to find out."

"Well, if that's all you —" But there Cousin Belle paused, remembering just in time that it was not for her to judge.

Christina got up suddenly and walked restlessly about the room; then she stopped as suddenly and looked at her face in the heart-shaped mirror. "I wonder what sort of little girl you'll be if you're here to look in the mirror a year from to-day," she said softly.

She stood in silence — looking, looking; and Cousin Belle watched her, her tender soul miserably distracted by the same wonder.

The next moment Christina was on her knees beside her. "I know what the matter is, Cousin Belle. I'm a child of trouble."

"My dear, no!" Cousin Belle was horrified. "If ever a child was a child of joy, it has been you."

"Yes, I know. But that's been because of father — because he's been so strong and

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brave. I've never thought of it before. But I'm a wicked thing. Yes, I am. To-day I love my father, and I love my home — I love this room. I love the pine trees on Sunset Hill. I love the smoke of these chimneys. I stood and watched it curling up into the sky as I came home, and it seemed to me as if my soul was in it, I loved it so. The smoke in your home chimneys — it means the light and the warmth inside that you've grown up in — it means everything that has made you what you are. And yet —" she waited a moment — "to-morrow I shall be gone. And the trouble is that I shan't care. I shall love all the new things just as I've loved the old ones. Nothing that's gone will matter to me. That's the trouble now about Benny. He isn't here, and so he — well, I'm wicked, that's all. I'm like Madam Kitty, I suppose. I never felt that until to-day. Father's right. I've got to find out what it means to be her daughter."

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Then looking up, and seeing the expression on Cousin Belle's face, she laughed.

"Dear Cousin Belle, don't look so overwhelmed. Oh me!" She clasped her hands across her collar-bone. "I've just thought. We should have let Maroline Spence have tea with us this afternoon."

Cousin Belle's eyes were full of contrition. "Still, I'm so glad we didn't remember sooner," she added truthfully. "Just let's have some more tea and have her up now."

"In your room, then. And mind, Cousin Belle, don't you let her mouse around father while I'm gone — any more than you can help."

"I thought you said you wouldn't care about anything after you were gone."

The girl turned away. "Oh, well — father —" and then she began to sing.

And at home that night Maroline Spence said to her mother: "She's the most unfeeling little thing I ever heard of. She

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doesn't care *that* for her father, and I think he's beginning to see the difference."

She did not explain what she meant by the difference.

CHAPTER V

“ CONCERNING CATHERINE ”

“ Oh, father, look ! ” exclaimed Christina.
“ Look at the bill-boards.”

She was staring out of the cab window as they drove from the West Station to the Lorraine. The street they were passing through was a babel of trucks and cars and carriages and automobiles; the walks on either side a confusion of faces suggestively Hebrew. The untidy windows of a succession of untidier shops presented, in one, a frowzy fowl, sprawling yellow-skinned and lean against a platter of some deplorable looking fleshly substance; in the next a hat wreathed with blue roses making strident appeal to beauty's passing daughters to come in and buy. There were strange little shops sunk half-way into

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the basement with dark, uncertain steps and men stumbling over them and each other, and everywhere women and children and babies, and wherever there was an unoccupied space or a vacant window, theater bills blazing big-lettered attractions, with a star's face or even a whole picture from an act of the play.

"Yes," said Sargent in answer to Christina's excited remark, "*Concerning Catherine* — didn't I tell you it was on here? We're going to see it to-night. It's made a hit. But *The Fire Fools* will make a bigger one," he added, more to himself than to her.

"*Concerning Catherine* — *Iliel Sargent*," repeated Christina, transported with pride. "And you haven't seen a play of your own, father —"

"Not for a long time. Not since *The Ten Spot* — absurd thing, but it made me, so far as the public goes."

"How could you keep away?" wondered

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Christina. “ Think of the ones you’ve had on. *The Marriages of Martha* — that was a dear. And *The Heel of Achilles* — that was horrid.”

“ Quite otherwise. It was the dear,” protested Sargent.

“ Oh, it was clever enough,” admitted Christina scornfully. “ But you wouldn’t have me say I thought it was nice, would you? ”

“ I should turn you over to the police as a suspicious character.”

Christina was satisfied.

They had crossed the bridge now, and were coming into a neighborhood that began by intimating a taste for cleaner windows and ended in clean ones; the street widened and grew quieter, and conversation ceased to be a matter of vocal high jump and pole vaulting.

“ It’s easy enough to stay out of it,” continued Sargent, evidently following his own

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train of thought. "When once you know how, you're better clear of the horde of people who only half know. I've worked out my dramatic salvation in my own way, but it's all really owing to Far End. You can think in Far End. A man can't think here. You'll see after to-night. He can learn to be smart and entertaining, if not witty, but all that goes. Some other man comes along with a new twist to his smartness and wit, and your day is over. If you would keep your place year after year, you must give the world something — not that it need think about — it has no time for that — but something that you have thought about for it. And at Far End —"

"Oh, Far End!" murmured Christina. In a moment she was back again in yesterday, looking out of her window toward Sunset Hill, watching, as she and Benny had so often watched in silence, the sun speed the

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day's last arrow of light across the silver pallor of that sea of space whose depths were known neither to the night nor the morning cradled within its mystery.

“ Far End,” repeated Christina, “ and then these streets, father! Snow was never meant to fall here. And all those children —” she was thinking of the gutter as a playground — “ there shouldn't be any children, either.”

“ My dear, the interests of the State demand —”

“ Then the State's an old brute and had better be fired.”

“ That has been said before, if differently,” remarked Sargent. “ And yet in that jellied mass of humanity there occurs the miracle. One day in the midst of it something squirms and keeps on squirming harder and faster, until it evolves for itself a backbone and upon it begins to shape the image of divinity,

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and by and by it stands forth and challenges the attention of all the backboned sons of men, and there's your Lincoln or your —"

"Father! I'm sure Lincoln began with a quite respectable family backbone compared with —"

"There! You've spoilt it with your insufferable New England literalness," sighed Sargent. "I wing my soul on fancy's flight and my daughter, airy creature that she looks, holds me down with hands that weigh a ton apiece."

"You've been flippant all day." Christina's tone reproached.

"Flippant?" Sargent considered. "But of course —"

"Of course? When I'm —"

But they were at the hotel, and Sargent hurried her to her room with the admonition that she dress quickly, so that they might have a leisurely dinner and reach the theater in good time; he was suddenly pricked with cur-

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iosity as to his play. It made a difference when you came up in the elevator, and listened to a gay group of women and their escorts planning to see *Concerning Catherine*, and in despair over the improbability of securing seats.

“ It’s no use — we shall have to go and see *The Wish Horse*. Everything’s taken this week.”

He knew that. But it was different to hear it said — there in your ears by a woman who was looking at you, because conceivably you were better worth looking at than the man she was with — a woman who did not know that you were *you*. That was childish of course, but it was refreshing to let go and just be a child once in a great while. The spirit of the city was at work upon his blood.

But he knew its tricks of old, and while he felt the swifter flow and exulted that the youth in him was not yet dust, he knew that all that he had said to Christina was for him

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the truth of life. For him it had had to be the protected solitude of Far End, or an existence long since burnt over by the fires that are always seeking fuel. If at forty-five he had in his face the expression of a man who knew his strength, at twenty-five he had had only strength enough — but that was much — to comprehend the menace of his weaknesses.

The winter after his wife had left him he had spent in New York, learning his “trade” from the people who only “half knew how.” He had learnt many other things and taken the memory of them back to Far End, and there threshed out the stern significance of the deeds that men do when the ship drags anchor. He had spent the winter in throwing things overboard — the loves and faiths and fears that were his inheritance. Let her ride high upon whatever sea sucked her keel! — this human craft set out upon a quest that ended in the darkness in which it had begun.

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But when he reached home again it was to find in the face of his child something that he had overlooked in his reaction against all that was lasting as God in mortal love.

And upon that rock he had begun the rebuilding of his house of life.

“Flippant all day?” Bless the child! She understood him better than that, and he understood her well enough to know that the little reproach had been a half cry to him for comfort now that the fact of their separation was really upon them — that they were here in the city where he was to leave her alone to new experiences — to a readjustment of herself as something other than the Christina she had known and understood.

But he had no comfort to give her; he was too sorely perplexed and in need of it himself. He wrestled with the hidden power that was driving him to a step that led he saw not whither, the while he was conscious that the momentous decisions of his life had been

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effected invariably in obedience to that veiled authority. Long ago he had gathered prim-roses in Overshot Wood and kissed a girl in a high-hedged lane because he had to, and when that girl, grown but lovelier to him in marriage, left him and his child, believing that in another love she had found what she missed in his, he let her go in silence, and stilled himself upon the teachings of the philosophers, choking down the heart in his throat with precepts as to the rights of the individual, and the joys of sharing with the sages the purer vision denied to the man possessed by the devil of his own self-righteous passions.

He had let her go, because he saw with the prescience of the man of quick and young imagination that the way that took her from him was the one that she must follow if she were ever to reach beyond her own limitations. There were moments when he was dimly and humbly conscious that in admitting

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this he laid hold for an uncertain instant upon the garments of the Unseen, yet in the next breath his rebelling soul felt only the pricks that met his wounds.

And to-morrow he would speed his child from him; she too must go. He knew that, although he did not understand or accept the explanations of his decision that he offered so plausibly to Cousin Belle. But there was upon him the consciousness that the power that had controlled his life to the furtherance of its own secret ends was once again at the helm; he must set his sails for the open sea, asking naught of the hooded figure in the stern.

CHAPTER VI

MRS. DICKY WARDER

"Look at the adorable little creature!"

Sargent glanced at Christina; she met his eyes frankly and laughed.

"Never mind, father," she said consolingly; "it's really only my frock. You know what a fright I am unadorned. But I'm very glad they think it's pretty, for I suppose —" She did not finish the sentence, for in these later days they were not mentioning Madam Kitty. She peeped around her father's tall figure for another glimpse of the two ladies whom the crowd in the entrance to the theater had pushed so close to them, but there were only two stupid men there now.

"It's the greatest day of my life," said

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Christina solemnly, when they were disposed in their seats and arranged to see and hear to the utmost of their seeing and hearing capacity. She read the program over and over again: "Mr. Daniel Merryman presents Miss Edith Borringdon and Mr. Charles Agnew in the comedy CONCERNING CATHERINE, by Mr. Iliel Sargent."

She looked at her father with quivers of delight; there he was — this very great man — and she was sitting beside him, and nobody knew anything about it. She gazed excitedly at the crowded house, and then at the people close around them; it was ridiculous of them to be so preoccupied with themselves.

After the play began Sargent sat leaning forward a little into the aisle with a watchdog look in his eyes; yet sometimes he smiled, but that was generally when no one else did; Christina imagined that perhaps he was remembering something he had thought when he wrote that sentence. And once he uncon-

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sciously held up his hand and said: "Oh no!" but no one noticed him, for the house was almost immediately in a roar, and the curtain was coming down and going up again, and "Catherine" was smiling and bowing, and then the lights flashed on and the theater buzzed like a big gilded insect with comment and laughter.

"Well?" demanded Christina eagerly.

"Oh, I don't know." Sargent considered. "I'm glad I came, of course. It's better than I thought on the stage. It's a real thing."

"Do they do it the way they ought to?"

Sargent smiled. "There are only a few places where they made it hard for me to understand myself. But there's a sentence in the next act — the whole play is epitomized in it — I'm wondering if Miss Borringdon has got it. I wish we could get up and walk about," he added. "But they don't

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do that here. And anyway, I suppose we couldn't."

Every time Sargent looked at Christina it was borne in afresh upon him what a blossom she was. Perhaps these people around them who were talking about her — he had caught that — would see her here again — they might even be the people who were to know her — friends and acquaintances of Mrs. Dicky Warder perhaps. Well to-night she was all his.

"Father, you're scowling fearfully," objected Christina. "People won't think you're nice if you do that. You look as if you were bound hand and foot in the camp of the enemy."

"I am."

"You won't forget about everything — everything that I've told you about?" she asked in a voice grown suddenly breathless. "You'll let the little Ninde boy go out rid-

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ing with you on Domino? It will be a wonderful thing for him."

"Yes — yes!" He was glad the curtain went up just then; the thing that was like the wrenching away of a limb from his body was too irretrievably upon him now to bear discussion.

The act went with a tremendous swing; he forgot all about his technical interest in it and watched and listened like a boy at his first show, with just an uneasy wonder now and then as to the possibility of maintaining the enthusiasm of an audience at this pitch through two more acts.

He and Christina sat silent through the next interval, her hand tight in his, her eyes more often on his face than anywhere else; the wonder of her father grew upon her, and all the love in her heart crowded to her lips to tell him so. The man behind them said softly to the other man that he wouldn't blame any boy who lost his head over a little

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beauty like that, and Sargent, catching the remark, turned it over haltingly in his mind. He had never recognized Christina as a beauty. Beauty to him implied a tall splendor-diffusing type of woman like Beatrix Esmond. He *thought* Beatrix Esmond; what he really meant was Mrs. Dicky Warder as he remembered her twenty years before.

But Tina — Tina was just an adorable little girl with all the charms of youth and innocence, thank God! It was absurd to call her a “beauty.” Tina was too small and too intimately, capriciously sweet in her looks and her ways to be handicapped by any such description as that. She was just Tina; there was nothing more descriptive to say.

At the end of the third act Sargent forgot himself; in the same moment with the man behind he shouted: “Brava!” and Miss Borringdon, monotonously bowing and smiling, looked suddenly at her particular admirers in the third and fourth rows; she

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had never met Sargent, but she had a photograph of him. The result was that a few moments later an usher hurried down the aisle and handed him a note.

Sargent read it and considered; then he scribbled a reply, aware meanwhile of the flutter of interest in the people around them. "He's got all the looks of somebody," he heard the big man say—the big man who splashed remarks as freely as a big dog splashes water in a puddle too small for him.

"Father, what was it?" Tina's blue eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Miss Borringdon," he said repressively, and passed the note to her.

"Shall you go?" she asked, giving it back to him.

"I said I would," he answered in a regretful tone.

He was more than regretful when he turned in a moment and found at his elbow a little man with eager eyes and a nose pleas-

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antly perched above a wide, persuasive mouth.

But he smiled and said: "Mr. Beebe! And I can't say one word now. I wonder if you would care to breakfast with me to-morrow at ten at the Lorraine?"

And Beebe, though self-assured that he was the most powerful dramatic critic in America, was inordinately flattered by being recognized by a man whom he had only once met, years before, and allowed himself to be dismissed, and the curtain went up, and Sargent forgot his quick annoyance at being once more at the mercy of the man with the notebook, and prepared to listen, this time altogether unemotionally, to the fourth act, in which occurred the scene that a great foreign actress had recently described as the most dramatic in any modern play. He had said "Rot!" when he read that, but that was in Far End. To-night he was here, and for once he would be the outsider and forget that the sweat of his soul had been demanded of

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him in the making of plays that were successful because primarily they "entertained" the crowd. So had Shakespeare's, and perhaps a hundred years from now the "Plays of Iliel Sargent" would have won their place upon the immortal shelves as the most serious comment of literature upon the questions of their day.

Yet presently he found himself resenting it as an aspersion upon the character of his intentions when he saw the woman in front begin furtively to wipe her eyes. Couldn't she distinguish between comedy and tragedy? He was afraid to look at Tina, and then, all at once, he was conscious of an unbidden lump in his own throat.

Oh undoubtedly, taken as a whole, this was a strong act!

"Tell you what, Eben! This is the stuff. It gets me every time," said the big man to his companion. "Saw it three times in New York."

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“ It'll do.”

But Eben Gregory was not thinking particularly of the play; he was watching the audience, for he was a psychological politician, and it was the people — The People — and what stirred them, and the reason, that concerned him. Many years before, poor and unknown, he had begun a journey on foot to the White House; he was very near there now, traveling in a private car at the expense of the State. He had been busy for days on his next big speech, looking in every face he met for points for it. The little girl in front had given him one, and over there, in the box with the Nevils, the sight of Mrs. Dicky Warder had given him another.

But he was not especially pleased with Mrs. Warder to-night; she was having a small and intimate supper-party for Miss Borringdon after the play, and he was not invited. He understood; my lady was holding back. He was not annoyed by her reluctance; he merely

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objected to some of her methods of displaying it. However, that would right itself; he denied all doubts as to the outcome of the struggle between them.

He had deferred marriage because he had realized, at an age when he saw other young men making fools of themselves, that in his case it must be made to wait upon his ambitions. But by the time he had reached the place where he could afford to consider his desires, he had become critical, as much, in a way, to his own regret as to that of the women whose attractions charmed him but failed to involve his emotions.

That, however, was before he had made his quiet entrance into the exclusive circle where politics were of less import than tea-trays. For there he met Mrs. Dicky Warder, and it did not take him long to discover that she was the woman for whom he had been decreed to wait. He was too facile in social acquirement to be betrayed into evidence of his

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origin by his habits, big or little — the origin which he never denied, but exploited with a dexterity that proclaimed him no mean student of human nature; but there were times when he despised himself for the bourgeois that he knew himself to be, and never more than when he found himself reflecting that if you had not achieved family by birth, you had better do so by marriage.

Yet that was his intention. Besides, there was Mrs. Dicky Warder herself.

It *was* a great act. As he watched it Sargent wondered confusedly just what made it that, as might any ignoramus who knew nothing of the structure of a drama. Yet he understood as none other who listened, all that a man may understand of the difference that makes of him a genius and of the man next to him a show-case with nothing to show. Here was no mere triumph of adroitly manipulated stage-craft; it was life up there on the boards, lived through and transcribed with

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that surety of selection that compelled the assent, not only of the emotions, but of the intellect of every man and woman who watched and listened.

"Father!" exclaimed Christina. "Did you know it was like that?"

He smiled, for at that moment it seemed to him that all that he had ever felt of the things that mattered to a man was in that act; what he had never quite realized until to-night was, how clear a mirror his own head was of every other man's heart.

"Now what shall I do with you?" he said to Christina, when the curtain went down for the last time and the lingering house remembered with a plunge into its wraps that it was not spending the night in opera chairs. "I had rather not take you with me."

They were standing in the aisle, and Sargent spoke somewhat loudly in his perplexity.

"Pardon me —" Gregory, also in the aisle,

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handed his card to Sargent, who received it somewhat unwillingly — “perhaps you would be willing to intrust the young lady to my care. I have had the pleasure of sitting near you this evening, and I understand that Miss Borringdon wishes to see you.”

“Yes — yes. I am Mr. Sargent and this is my daughter. You are very kind.” But Sargent hesitated.

Christina looked at the card in her father’s hand, and then at Gregory.

“Oh!” She considered him gravely. “Are you really the governor of the state?”

Gregory laughed. “I’ll never admit it if it is going to disqualify me for the office I am at present seeking.”

“And you haven’t any gold lace or a cocked hat!” exclaimed Christina disapprovingly. “I always thought governors wore nothing else.”

“Really, Tina —”

But she waved her father away. “She’s

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stamping by this time. You needn't worry. I'll take the best of care of the governor. I feel like a real mounted policeman."

And Sargent seeing that she intended to be disposed of in a manner so entirely in keeping with her taste for adventure, hurried away, and stumbled around behind the stage amid the amazing and dreary litter characteristic of the wrong side of the curtain, saying, "Miss Borringdon?" to everyone he met, until he found himself at a sudden turn, confronted by the actress herself.

"Oh, Mr. Sargent!" she exclaimed, holding out both hands to him; "I thought you were never coming. And you look so quiet and not a bit excited and isn't it wonderful? And I'm so glad now that you didn't tell me that you were going to be here, yet when I really saw you my spirits went up and up and up. I hope you don't think I ought to play the part better, because I never can — no one could."

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"No. You almost satisfy me." But Sargent's smile atoned.

Miss Borringdon was already in her wraps, and as she talked she turned into a long, straight passage which led directly to the side-street door.

"I'm going out to supper," she explained, "and I suppose I'm keeping my hostess waiting out there. But tell me, when can I really see you? Oh look!—" she made an extravagant gesture—"there's Mrs. Dicky Warder coming for me. She's the kind of woman you mustn't keep waiting. Please —"

"I'll say good-night then," said Sargent. "And to-morrow — I'm at the Lorraine. I'll call you up. Good-night."

But Miss Borringdon clung to his hand. "Don't go! Please stay and meet Mrs. Warder. She'll ask you to supper. It'll be —"

He got away somehow, but there was only one visible path of escape open to him; he

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walked directly towards Mrs. Dicky Warder, feeling as if he were suddenly stricken blind and deaf and dumb, and yet hearing the rush in his ears, and seeing her so distinctly that as he saw her now he never forgot her, his brain seeming to act as a perfect recording instrument, but quite independently of him.

She came resplendently, her skirts held daintily from the floor — her white brocaded coat with its sable trimmed edges thrown back, so that in his single swift glance the remembered line from her cheek to the spring of her shoulder set singing in his blood the refrain of a melody that a man once having heard never forgets.

But he could not meet and pass her, face to face; at his left hand he saw a door and opened it, pushing himself backward into the darkness.

But the door remained open. And Mrs. Dicky Warder went by.

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She found Miss Borrington in her dressing-room, whither that overflowing soul had returned for the rose she simply must have for her hair.

"Oh Mrs. Warder, I've kept you waiting and you've come after me alone!"

"But of course Mr. Budgett wanted to come with me," said Mrs. Warder calmly. "He always wants to come, no matter where you're going. I tell him that his malady is involuntary locomotion."

"I don't believe it's that," gurgled Miss Borrington. She was a great emotional actress, and took her revenge by being an absurdly trivial person in her own part.

"Yes, really. If I told him I was leaving for Paradise to-morrow, he would buy transportation and have all his luggage checked too, and I cannot imagine anyone more out of place as an angel than Mr. Budgett."

"I don't know," said Miss Borrington re-

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flectively, as she pinned the rose below her left ear. "When you think of it, that's a pretty hard test."

"It was meant to be, I suppose."

Mrs. Warder thought about that for a moment, her mind running quickly into a channel not adapted to interest Miss Borringdon. Then she said: "It was a silly thing to do — prowling about after you alone — but the mood for adventure was upon me. And I felt I was in for it in that horrid, half-lighted, everlastingly long, narrow passage, for a man came plunging towards me and then vanished into a deadly dark room. Of course I didn't look as I went past the door, for it took all the courage in me to go by at all, for there wasn't a sound in that darkness, and yet I felt he was there, looking at me. He wasn't really, you know."

Miss Borringdon turned around from the mirror.

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"That's funny," she said slowly. "Mr. Sargent said good-night to me at this end of the passage just as you came in at the other. I saw you and ran back for my rose, and he went on towards you."

"Oh! — you said — Mr. — Sargent?"

"Yes. Iliel Sargent, I mean. At the end of the second act to-night I looked down and there he sat in the third row. He's never seen the play before. I sent him a note, and when he came up, I begged him to stay and meet you. I did my best to keep him, but he went off like a rocket. Oh, he's an inveterate recluse. And it's a shame, for he's the stunningest man I've seen in many moons — the great, splendid, blue-eyed Viking sort. He lives an ideal kind of life somewhere in the country with his daughter. Well, I'm ready at last." Miss Borringdon gave a final twitch to the yards of lemon-colored veiling she had been tying about her blonde head.

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"Still, that was queer. I wonder why in the world he dashed into that room, because the worst recluse on earth, if he had half an eye, and this man has very much two, would a great deal rather meet you in a narrow passage than not." She laughed merrily.

"Would he?" said Mrs. Warder.

CHAPTER VII

POINSETTIAS

In the dusk, alone with him for their last moment, Christina clung to her father.

"But I don't want to go in there," she said, with a resentful look at the heavy, black door. "Father, let me go back to the Lorraine with you. We'll have such a good time together to-night, and we — we'll forget all about this. I don't understand. What am I going in there for?" She looked at the door again. "Why did I come when I don't want to? What did I let you bring me for? Father — I'm not going."

She took a step down the long flight; the cabman expectantly gathered the slackened reins tighter.

"Tina —" Sargent's hand rested a mo-

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ment on her shoulder — “we won’t begin that all over again. I thought we had settled it and were quite happy this afternoon.”

“Yes — I know. I promised, but —” She hid her face against his coat sleeve. Then she looked up. “Very well. You may ring.”

He rang the bell, and they stood silent, like any conventional callers. Cabby surmised that he would get tired of sitting, and got off his box, and walked up and down swinging his arms, partly for exercise and partly because the damp evening was coming on with its own peculiar chill; in the half-light he looked like a weirdly human adjustment of Indian clubs.

Sargent’s eyes wandered up and down the street; the orderly rows of houses on either side stretched on and on, growing duller and duller, until all of a sudden they were caught up and glorified and forever lost in a smother of sunset haze.

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“After all, little girl, even here, just as in Far End —” But the door behind them opened silently; they felt a difference and turned to see a maid who stood waiting with a smile of welcome on her Irish face — a smile that Sargent remembered to his comforting.

“Good-by, Tina.”

The child said nothing.

Half-way down the steps Sargent stopped and looked back — the door was already closed; he was glad of that. But Tina was there; he craved a picture of the house, and so he stood seeking an impression that should be some solace to him in the days to come.

And what he saw was poinsettias — poinsettias flaming scarlet at every window; the thought of them haunted and bewildered and hurt him for many days.

For between primroses and poinsettias the dividing years were set like swords.

CHAPTER VIII

MADAM KITTY

Christina followed the maid through the warmly lighted hall, up the staircase, then through another hall until they came to a little suite of rooms set by itself; there was a sitting-room and beyond it a bed-room; the sitting-room all in gray and white, even the furniture being of a pale gray wood such as she had never seen before. The bed-room was apparently a white room, yet even there she caught a glimpse of poinsettias.

"I will tell Mrs. Warder you are here," said the maid. "These are your rooms, Miss Sargent, and if you find anything not as you wish, please speak to me about it."

"Oh thank you," said Christina vaguely.

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Her rooms! — she had never felt anything less hers in her life than these rooms. She thought of her simple, dignified room at Far End, and glanced about her, drawing the contrast.

“ If I belong in one, I certainly don’t in the other.” And with a sweep of tears to her eyes she wondered again why she was here. Benny and Domino and Kad — their names sounded strange and unreal in this place. And Cousin Belle — she felt as if she had lived somewhere a hundred years ago with Cousin Belle.

To-morrow her father would be back at Far End again, in *their* home — but even the Lorraine had been home to her with him.

She was still standing in the middle of the room, her mind active with plans for flight to Far End and the bliss of being already there to receive her father upon his return, when her ear caught the soft flow of satin and the sound of a light step crossing the bare floor

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at the end of the hall. Instantly, everything she had heard about her mother rushed tumultuously through her mind; one emotion clashed with another; she was like a person drowning in a sea that rose up and clamored at its prey.

Just for an instant — on the threshold — Mrs. Dicky Warder paused. And in the flash of this first sight of her mother, Christina was conscious only of the intricate pattern of a priceless lace, woven of wonder threads by some convented soul bred to the things of the spirit while fashioning webs for the adorning of some sister out in that world in which the pale brides of Christ had no part.

Lace — such lace as Christina had never dreamed of. Yet it was girlishly simple — this gown that Mrs. Warder had chosen to wear at dinner to-night — mounted over the palest pink-shot blue, with not a gather or a ruffle to mar the sincerity of line from the shoulder to the tip of the slipper that seemed

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but an embroidery of pink over a pale blue foot.

“Christina!”

Mrs. Warder came quickly; the thought darted through Christina that *she* was not nervous; great ladies like this never were.

“Oh Madam Kitty!” Christina took the hand held towards her. “I’m very glad — it’s very nice to see you — and I’ll stay a little while, but —” Then, at something in Mrs. Warder’s eyes, she paused.

“Madam Kitty?” The tone expressed no comment; it merely inquired.

Christina had never heard a voice quite like that; she found herself remembering the faint green of a glass of wine she had once watched a wonderful auburn-haired girl drinking at table d’hôte in the inn at Wernigerode with a wonderful *offizier* whom she called “Prance” in her adorably odious French.

But that was an absurd thing to be remembering now, and Madam Kitty looking at her

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with the beginning of a smile — a teasing smile.

The next instant Mrs. Warder laughed. "Let us sit down, at any rate — even if you are only going to stay a very little while." She chose for herself the beguilingly curved, little gray satin couch, while Christina seated herself in a straight, uncomfortably high chair which put the floor at a disadvantage in regard to her feet.

Mrs. Warder leaned forward. "Now — tell me — why Madam Kitty?"

"Oh!" Christina considered. "But we've always called you Madam Kitty."

"Oh!" It was Mrs. Warder's turn to consider; for an instant there was surely a cloud upon her brilliance. That "we"! "I see. But you can imagine. It was unexpected."

"Oh!" said Christina again. "I dare say. Does it sound odd to you?"

Mrs. Warder laughed. "Odd?" She

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glanced at herself in a mirror and repeated as if listening to a description of the woman she saw there: "Madam Kitty. How ridiculous!"

Christina sat straighter than ever, looking anxious but determined.

"I couldn't call you anything else, you know," she said, in a careful, kindly tone.

Instantly, Mrs. Warder was suffused with mirth. "Dear child, you need not. Madam Kitty forever! It's delicious."

She was thinking of the Nevils and the Dorchesters and Eben Gregory, and all the different things they would say. Yet, secretly, she was immensely relieved; the question as to what her daughter would call her had been as a nightmare to her. "Mother"? She abhorred the word; she had only to look in her glass to remember that. It would be a ludicrous word applied to her now — an epithet. "Mrs. Warder"? That would be insufferably bourgeois. But "Madam Kit-

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ty"! She smiled. There was a certain distinction in that from daughter to mother, and for fifteen years she had been trained to seek that quality above all others.

She flashed a quick, appraising look upon Christina. This was the child whom she had steadily assured herself she would not have in her house — until ten minutes ago. Then — shielded behind a mass of poinsettias — she had seen Iliel Sargent's face as he turned to look at the house transformed by the closing of a door into an impregnable barrier between himself and his child.

And she had vowed that she would not look out of a window that day — never more vehemently than when she heard the bell ring at the appointed hour! It was disappointing to discover oneself so weak.

This was the child. Then she had been so close to him last night that she must have touched him — Iliel! — when Mrs. Nevil pointed out the exquisite little creature in

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front of them. She had looked at Christina and said: "Yes, isn't she?" and looked again; all through the evening the face of the little girl thrust itself in among her thoughts of the play and of the man who had written it.

She now became aware of the fact that Christina was appraising her. That amused her, but she felt little interest in her estimate. The child was charming to look at, but probably a very miniature affair, mentally as well as physically.

"You might take off your hat," she said, smiling. "Joanna will have charge of your things. And she will help you get ready for dinner."

"I don't need anyone to help me." Christina's tone was decided.

"Really? Still, hooks and eyes and things."

"Oh well!" Christina's tone conceded.

"Dinner is at seven. Joanna will bring

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you some tea at once. You won't have more than just time to dress."

"Does it matter — what I put on?" asked Christina, suddenly perplexed and nervous.

"Ask Joanna. She will know."

It had been a relief to Mrs. Warder to observe that "the child" was quite normally clothed in the simple, dull blue coat and skirt, and hat to match, with its flopping brim and scarf of silk about it. But when it came to dinner — Heaven knew what spicily bedecked garment her little soul might array itself in. Hence the responsibility of saving the situation must be put upon Joanna; she had no intention of becoming involved in personal details with a daughter who really did not in the least belong to her. The little girl was a guest to whom she had every desire to be kind and attentive.

That was the situation. It was an unusual one, and the coolness with which the girl accepted it was rather striking; as she thought

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their meeting over in her own room after she had left Christina, it occurred to her that she might have more possibilities on her hands than she had bargained for. She had put great emphasis on her own detachment without any thought that she might find herself faced by her match in that respect. It was rather comical, and promised entertainment.

She rang the bell for Joanna, and when that Irish-eyed handmaiden appeared, she said to her: "Miss Sargent will want your help about what to put on presently, Joanna. Of course I don't know what she has, but do the best you can, and if you can't do anything, well,"—Mrs. Warder's rare dimple was just to be seen—"put her in one of Sister Mary Delphine's nightgowns—take some tucks in it and tie a sash—a very big one—around her waist, and Mr. Gregory will never know."

"Indeed, ma'am, and no man would but us," commented Joanna, and went away laughing.

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But no responsibility for Christina's appearance rested upon Joanna that night. For when she returned to her charge Christina's sense of her capacity to manage her own affairs was uppermost again, and Joanna was told quietly which gown to take from the trunk, and beyond "doing up" three hooks and eyes was permitted no further privileges.

CHAPTER IX

THE GOVERNOR

"There's something I must tell you," said Mrs. Warder — a trifle reluctantly Eben Gregory thought.

"Well?" he smiled.

"I have a little girl staying with me — you will meet her at dinner. She is going to stay with me for — for some time, I dare say. I really don't know. It all depends. I don't exactly know why she's here. It's rather strange and a little difficult to explain." She hesitated, feeling herself in some confusion. And Mrs. Dicky Warder was not used, of late years, to anything but a state of complacency for herself.

"Well?" said Gregory again. It was rather astonishing to him to discover my lady

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in any such uncertain phase as this, but it added distinctly to his entertainment, and suggested that at last she might be in the approachable mood he was always hoping to surprise in her. He had a sudden vision of this woman as wife; he took a deep, hidden breath.

“I feel I must tell you about it. You see — you come here — a good deal —” Mrs. Warder’s eyelids half lifted; she was undoubtedly confused, even annoyed at having to make explanations to anyone — nevertheless, she was unable to resist playing with the knowledge that she was producing a “moment” between herself and Gregory. She was a born coquette, and her training had made of her a flirt of a peculiarly capricious type; she impressed the ordinary man — in spite of the fact that the depth of her celebrated shoulders made it possible for her to wear her gown appreciably lower than any other woman dared — as a cold and prudish

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person. And she found the imposition of such an attribute of the utmost service in protecting her from the dull attentions of the ordinary man. She thought it altogether desirable that she should be popularly supposed to be what she knew herself not to be; it was a protection to those dense creatures to whom the subtleties of a thoroughly sophisticated woman figured as inexcusable obtuseness. She had sat with a man more than once, talking to him in her clear, cool voice, aware that his eyes hardly left her beautiful throat, the while he rebelled at her indifference to himself; she watched, amused, understanding more than he did, tormenting and repelling him in the same glance, securely scornful of his weaknesses. To play with him coldly was her pitiful reprisal for the moral outrage that she had suffered as the wife of Dicky Warder.

But Eben Gregory was not of that type; she had found him her match each time that

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she had ventured an experiment upon him, and as simplicity was irksome to her and would never be believed of her by him, she had felt herself lately somewhat perplexed as to the most satisfactory method of dealing with a man masculinely sophisticated, but by no means tired of the game. She had been sufficiently interested in the idea of marrying him to avoid any direct consideration of the subject; she took a side-path through the fields whenever she found herself squarely confronted by the question in the highway.

She really had no desire to marry Eben Gregory or anyone else; that which she would get in exchange would be no equivalent for her loss. She had been released from the holy estate in a confusion of mind concerning it that she had since been content to accept as negligible, and while she recognized in Gregory a type of man entirely different from her husband,—man was man! and the woman in her shrank, recalling past chastisement.

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Deep within her consciousness there was scarred the memory of her first and only violence against her master, and of his light remark as he held her silent in his arms: "Confess now that you have enjoyed being taught obedience as much as I have enjoyed teaching you to obey."

She gave him no further opportunity for that sort of enjoyment; her pride sustained her in submission in spite of her suspicion that he understood her attitude and derived still keener amusement from it.

And yet she perceived that, notwithstanding all this, there was a proximate chance that, sooner or later, she would marry — not Gregory, but somebody, anybody. She loved little Donny Nevil, and she knew why she abhorred the word "mother"; she had forsaken her right to it, to have it later denied to her, and so she turned upon it and smote it. But away beneath all this tumult of the surface, *she* knew. Hidden in her was the in-

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satiable need of motherhood — the need of spending the tenderness, the rich capacities for sacrifice and suffering going to waste in her. That was what she resented — that she was still nothing more than an ornament upon life; that she had no imperative relation to it. She knew more; she knew that somewhere in her soul there was the vision, unobscured and uncorrupted, of all that the love of a man might mean to the heart of a woman.

That is, she knew all these things in rare, very rare moments. Then she saw them with blinding clearness, and afterwards the memory of them lingered, tormenting her like the perfume of an unknown flower, and rendering her a capricious, dangerous, troubling woman to any man whom she might happen lightly to fancy. For she was troubling and dangerous to herself of late; there was developing in her a sheer passion to possess something of which she felt she had been defrauded.

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And yet — she had no avowed intention of marriage.

And still — and often, when she reached this place in her reflections, she began to smile — if he only knew it, no marriageable man was safe with her! For it might at any moment happen that the mood that was such a perplexity to herself might overwhelm her and sweep her and the momentary man to destruction — and the altar. She had even, when she first met him, taken the measure of Ally Budgett with such a mood in mind. But Ally! — the thought of him now as a matrimonial gamble always restored her balance. One could not marry a man who possessed in perfection the qualities one adored in one's dog.

“Yes, I come here a great deal,” said Gregory, slowly, in answer to her remark. “Am I becoming — too constant?”

She ignored that. “You will see the little girl to-night.”

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“ Oh! — she’s coming down to dinner? ”

Mrs. Warder looked grave. “ Yes — for dessert.”

There was a pause; then Gregory said: “ Does it interest you to have a child about? ”

“ That’s what I’m interested to find out.” She hesitated, and listened; she had caught the sound of Joanna’s light tap. “ You shall see her at once — I will bring her in now.”

He protested. “ Honestly, I’m not much on children.”

She made a counter protest with a light shrug of her shoulders, and he reflected that it was perhaps worth enduring the child for a few moments to watch her walk the length of the room with the indolent, sweeping step that hurried for no man’s pleasure. There was a contradictory, listless eagerness in her grace that had an alluring effect upon a spectator, were he a man. Gregory had heard women allude to Mrs. Warder as a person who courted observation at all costs, but when

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he ventured to inquire of a bevy of her critics exactly what it was that she did that was "different," he obtained all the amusement he had sought by his question. For, ruled down to a final analysis, each lady's answer carried, in spite of its lesser or greater sting, an implication that there were points of resemblance between herself and the impaled Mrs. Warder not to be ignored; for what woman would deny herself possessed of the fascinations, if not of the arts, of the other?

After the door closed upon Mrs. Warder he looked about the familiar room with a newly critical perception that it was evidently true — what he had recently heard stated — that Dicky Warder had furnished his town house in pallid, neutral tints expressly designated to exploit his wife's mental and physical brilliance. It was to be questioned whether in his time those great masses of purple asters would have been permitted in this room toned to a single note of color — the pearl of clear

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smoke. He wished he had known Dicky Warder; the stories told of him were sufficiently contradictory vouchers for a unique and baffling personality. Mrs. Warder always spoke of him gracefully, whereas she never mentioned her first husband at all, which after all was not strange, for really one deceased husband was all that a woman should be required to memorialize; the line had to be drawn somewhere. She must have been a very charming young widow when Warder met her—in the West, Gregory vaguely remembered hearing.

Mrs. Warder found Joanna waiting in the hall. "Miss Sargent is ready, ma'am."

"How does she look, Joanna? Have you made her presentable?"

"She did that for herself, ma'am," said Joanna quickly. "She looks more like a wild rose than anything I ever saw that wasn't one."

"Well, bring her down." Mrs. Warder

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smiled; she was thinking of Gregory. Still, Christina was a child.

Her thought was that the girl's first question would be an inquiry as to whether she would "do." But Christina looked at her and said nothing, and Mrs. Warder reflected that when you were such a veritable wild rose of bewitchment the most becoming thing for you to do was doubtless to manifest a superior unconsciousness of your charm. She felt a little stupid when she remembered that in the theater last night the child had drawn the admiration of Mrs. Nevil and herself, but it had been a trying day for her, and Christina was still a medley of girls to her — the one she had preconceived her to be, and the one at the theater, and the one she had talked to superficially for a few unconvincing moments.

She gave her daughter her hand with a gracefulness in which there was nothing maternal and led her into the drawing-room, while she reflected that none of Sister Mary

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Delphine's most skillfully wrought night-dresses could have been more dainty than this little white silk frock with its deep border of embroidered daisies.

"Mr. Gregory, this is my daughter, Miss Sargent."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" exclaimed Christina instantly, her impassive face breaking into smiles.

Mrs. Warder looked from her to Gregory.

"I'm so glad it's you," added Christina joyfully.

"Well, well! — to think it should be you!" said Gregory. He looked at Mrs. Warder.

"Please explain. I'm quite in the dark," she complained.

"So am I," remarked Gregory.

"Oh Madam Kitty, last night — at the play — we — we saw him there. He took care of me afterwards — because —" Christina stopped; the rose in her face flushed deep.

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Before she would mention her father's name in this house there were some things that she meant to understand.

But Gregory was interested. "Miss Sargent and her father did me the honor of having supper with me last night," he said smoothly to Mrs. Warder; he was already busy fitting the various parts of this story together.

"How delightful to meet the author of such a play at such a triumphant moment for him," she answered with equal smoothness.

"Yes, I really preferred it to meeting the actress."

Mrs. Warder understood and smiled. "I think dinner is served," she said sweetly.

And then Christina had a new experience. She had grown up assuming a place for herself in any conversation as her right; to-night she discovered that it was for her to sit still and listen. She had never heard a woman talk upon such a variety of subjects with such an

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apparent profundity of knowledge as Madam Kitty displayed; she reflected with a growing sense of inhibition and injury that of course no man would want to talk to her, a mere girl, when he could talk to Madam Kitty. What did she, Christina, know of or care about a "message" and "operative" and "non-operative political principles"? As time passed she decided to tell her father that Governor Gregory was not nearly as interesting as they had both thought him. It was funny that they should have been so mistaken about him.

Mrs. Warder had invited Gregory to dinner because she shrank from a first evening alone with Christina; she felt that her wisdom had received its reward, for she had undoubtedly added a new piquancy to the problem she had always been aware that she was to him; it was evident that as he talked to her he was reconstructing her in a past, dominated, not by Dicky Warder, but by Iliel Sargent.

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And for her part she was thinking that last night Gregory had had supper with the man who in the last few weeks had been achieving a curious hold upon a region of her mind that she must presently isolate as a species of infected spot for which she was not in the least responsible. All the while that she was discussing the immediate political situation with the blithe fluency of knowledge at which Christina marveled, a fluency derived in part from a clever study of the daily papers, she was wondering intensely what Gregory had thought of Iliel Sargent. Moment by moment her desire to know a dozen different things was doubling and trebling, and there was no question that she could ask either of Gregory or Christina. She must arrive at the knowledge she craved by the tormentingly slow methods of deduction.

They went to the library after dinner, and Gregory settled in to a comfortable smoke. He was on the point of asking Christina

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whether her father had returned to Far End, but a glance at the girl's face silenced him; he remembered the evening before,—the laughter and lightness and charm, and the evident joy of the father and daughter in each other. The girl's eyes now had a bewildered, shut-out look, as though there were much that she did not understand. There might easily be that, he thought, in a situation in which there were evidently as many conflicting elements as there must be in this one.

He turned to Mrs. Warder. "You're not smoking," he remarked.

"I think you might do far worse than let Bond have that secretaryship," she answered. "I have an idea that, given a chance, his soul is the soul of the born clerk."

Gregory smiled; who could have believed that Mrs. Warder would be affected towards sentimental reserves of conduct by the presence of her own or any other person's daughter—the other person, in this case, being

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apparently Iliel Sargent, of all people! Besides, there was that gay little supper last night — he had no intention yet of overlooking the fact that he had not been invited to it, merely because he had consented to come to dinner to-night and be used as a shield between his hostess and an unexplained daughter.

“Oh please,” he entreated. “I feel myself a stranger within your gates. What is wrong? Bond or anybody else you like shall have that place if you’ll only not be quite so —”

“What made you think I wasn’t going to smoke?” she asked calmly — but she registered a vow against Eben Gregory. “I’m lazy to-night — tired, perhaps. Edith Boringdon is such a mad person — the most exhausting creature I know. I went shopping with her this morning — it’s an impossible experience. That’s why I’m going again, to-morrow.”

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“Have you known her long?” asked Gregory, as he watched her roll a cigarette as Dicky Warder had taught her to roll it twenty years before—but then there had been tears in her eyes; now she did the trick charmingly.

“She’s wonderful on the stage and hopeless anywhere else,” she answered. “But she amuses me, and I’m trying to teach her that if she will only cultivate the habit of sitting about in great silences, she will add amazingly to her reputation for temperament. She is a remarkable example of an actress who is so physically sensitive to her part that she creates the impression of being intellectually equal to it.”

But Christina could keep silence no longer; she felt as if she had been stone-still for a thousand years. And to watch—she leaned forward.

“Father hates women who smoke,” she said, in the tone of one who excommunicates.

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For a moment Mrs. Warder looked at the girl; then she laughed delightfully: "My dear, you are a charming little person," she remarked.

CHAPTER X

"VOWS AND THINGS"

"Haven't you had *any* education?" asked Mrs. Warder.

She and Christina were sitting in the morning-room, a gay, sunny spot with a more cozily feminine air than any other room in the house.

"Nothing that you could particularly call education," replied Christina cheerfully. "Of course I've read everything and all that, you know."

"Everything?"

"Everything a man reads. Father always said that while I wasn't in the least educated, I had a most companionable mind."

"Oh!"

"And that's really all a woman needs," pursued Christina in a confidential tone.

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“Naturally, I’m always meeting women who think I am too ignorant to talk to, but I never found a man who thought that.”

“Oh!” said Mrs. Warder again.

“Perhaps I’m not giving you quite a fair impression.” Christina looked a little anxious. “And yet when you really come down to it, I can’t do anything, actually, except talk in three languages—I talk beautiful French and Italian, but that’s because we’ve been abroad so much, one time and another—and I play my violin—well, rather stunningly, you know.”

“The violin?”

“Yes. Can’t you see me?” Christina jumped up, tucking an imaginary fiddle under her chin, and bowed away very effectively.

“You understand—I play it picturesquely,” she added as she sat down.

“Ally Budgett can accompany you,” remarked Mrs. Warder. “He plays just like that. It will be entertaining.”

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"I dare say," said Christina. "He's the tall, fair, young man — who looks anxious — the one we saw yesterday at Mrs. Nevil's, isn't he?"

"He isn't very young. He's forty at least."

"Dear me! I thought he was twenty-five, and I talked to him as if he were sixteen. He made me think of Benny by being not a bit like him."

"Benny?" Mrs. Warder's tone questioned.

Christina considered. Then she said: "I dare say you might as well know all about him at once. Benny is my fiancé."

"Are you really engaged to him?"

"Of course I am." Christina's eyes opened widely; she pulled a pillow from the couch and sat down on it on the floor; she always seemed more comfortable there than anywhere else. "That is, I am as much engaged to him as vows and pledges of undying love

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can make you engaged. But I'm never troubled much about that. Things like that don't really count.”

“Things like that?”

“Yes. Vows and things. And love — you know. Some girls take all that dreadfully seriously. I don't.”

“Oh!” Mrs. Warder was in a morning gown of some white crepe-like stuff with a knot of violets at her belt; her dark hair seemed to be tied high on the top of her head with a soft white ribbon; she looked fascinatingly young and slim to-day, and Christina liked her in this grave mood — which was well, in view of the fact that in these three days there had been many moments when she had cordially detested Madam Kitty, and been quite ready to say so, as Madam Kitty had definitely understood.

“But Benny takes it seriously. That's the mean thing about it.”

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"Would you rather that he didn't?" asked Mrs. Warder quickly.

"I'd simply never forgive him if it wasn't a matter of life and death to him."

Mrs. Warder smiled faintly.

"Don't you think it is?" demanded Christina. "Well, you'd know if you knew Benny. Benny thinks of nothing else but me — morning, noon and night — just me." She pointed at herself with a small finger. "That's so strange. I think of a thousand things every day besides Benny. You see there's really nothing to think about, except that he's the finest and best and truest and dearest thing in the world. That's all. And you can't keep saying it over and over. And as for getting married, that he's always dreaming about — he has sort of deep, muddled gray eyes — perhaps you don't think when you see him first that they're beautiful, but when you've known him a long time you just watch Benny's

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eyes, and you wait for the little slow smile that creeps around his mouth — and you just love him. That's all.”

“ I see,” said Mrs. Warder.

“ But as for marriage! — that seems to me a tiresome, upsetting kind of thing. Don't you think so, Madam Kitty? ”

“ Mrs. Nevil doesn't,” said Mrs. Warder quickly.

“ No.” Christina meditated. “ Of course there are those children. And they are such dears. I can understand that. I should like a lot of children — three, anyway.”

“ But in her case it's Mr. Nevil,” said Mrs. Warder perversely.

“ Yes.” Christina's monosyllable suggested profound consideration of all the idiosyncrasies of the case. “ That's the strange thing. It's the having to stick to one man part of it that I'm not sure of. I feel I could love so many.”

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"Oh!" said Mrs. Warder inexpressively.

"But didn't you?" Christina leaned forward.

"My dear!"

"Yes. But tell me about that. I want to know. I don't understand. There's father and there's Benny. They're both wonders, and yet —"

There was a tap at the door and Mrs. Nevil came in, a radiant, fair "darling of a woman," as Christina described her.

"I've been out with Baby," she said laughing, "wheeling her up and down Signal Street myself. You can't imagine how nice it is to do that — you feel yourself so worth while, and you know that it annoys some of our friends dreadfully to see you do it. Mrs. Dorchester asked me why I didn't wear a nursemaid's uniform. I told her I should love to, and I would."

"You'd look a dear in it," said Christina

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emphatically. “ I shall do that and wheel all my babies about myself too.”

The two women laughed. Then Mrs. Warder said: “ The question that is troubling Tina now is, who shall be the father of these apparently inevitable children. At present she is desirous of experimenting —”

“ Oh no ! ” broke in Christina. “ That’s only with husbands. I couldn’t let anyone but Benny be the father of my children.” She looked indignant.

“ Tell me —” Mrs. Warder laid her hand on Mrs. Nevil’s knee — “ what is Sybil Dorchester saying ? ”

“ My dear, everything ! ” Mrs. Nevil gurgled with amusement. “ I think she has not removed herself from her telephone for three days. She has rung up everyone she ever knew, and she begins each time: ‘ Have you heard about Mrs. Warder, and don’t you think it’s dreadful ? ’ ”

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"Lovely!" murmured Mrs. Warder.

"Well, at any rate, it's giving *Concerning Catherine* a great vogue." Mrs. Nevil darted a glance at her friend; Iliel Sargent had not been mentioned between them, and the explanation she had been given as to the arrival of Christina had been more subtle than enlightening.

Mrs. Warder laughed and got up from the couch. "I'll only be gone a moment. Stay with Tina until I come back, Sally. I must look at that hat from Madeira's."

Mrs. Nevil and Christina chatted cozily together, for they had taken a fancy to each other, until with a change of manner the girl said abruptly: "You're very fond of Madam Kitty, aren't you, Mrs. Nevil?"

Mrs. Nevil wondered what was coming. "I'm *very* fond of her."

"And she's very fond of you."

"Yes. She's fond of me."

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Christina leaned forward. “Then why do you let her do some things?”

“What things?”

“Well — this!” Christina’s hands swept across her shoulders. “I hate it.”

“Oh!” Mrs. Nevil considered. “But, dear, her neck is lovely.”

“Yes. But I hate — anyone — to know it.”

Mrs. Nevil looked unhappy. “Dear child, I have heard that artists say that no other woman in the world has such shoulders, and you see, when it’s a question of beauty like that, that makes a difference. Your mother thinks nothing of what offends you. It’s a mere matter of usage with her, and I think Mr. Warder —” She checked herself as the door opened and Mrs. Warder trailed in, the hat she had spoken of poised on her hand; she was considering it. But something in the two faces caught her attention.

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"What is it, Sally?" she asked.

"My dear, nothing. *Nothing.*"

"You were talking about me." Mrs. Warder sat down beside Mrs. Nevil; there were moments when she felt in herself a curious resemblance to Dicky Warder — when his methods came naturally to her as her own — when she felt herself lashed by the desire to torment.

She turned to Christina. "What was it? Tell me, Tina."

Mrs. Nevil got up. "I can't stay, Kitty. I ran in to ask you about those new Beringer people. Is one to call on them? No one seems to know."

Mrs. Warder smiled. "When in doubt, don't!" Then her eyes went back to Christina. "Tell me! I'm really interested, Tina."

For a moment Christina sat silent; then she gathered herself together. "I don't want to tell you, Madam Kitty. But some-

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thing makes me care so. I don't like it — I hate it when you do some things. I hate it when you smoke. And I hate it when you wear — you know — the gown last night.”

“Poor little girl!”

If the words carried a suggestion of sarcasm, it was belied by a certain wistfulness in Mrs. Warder's face. But the next moment she added with a touch of hardening: “Don't worry, Tina! It all comes to a woman, child, whether she will or not. You don't understand. Perhaps you never will. Sally —” she turned to Mrs. Nevil — “what do you think of this creation?” She put the hat on.

“That it's such a stunning style as to be a positive fright on any woman except you,” responded Mrs. Nevil promptly.

“That's what I wanted to be sure of. Now you may go, dear, as you're in such a hurry.”

CHAPTER XI

KITTY OF THE PRIMROSES

Within a month Christina was settled as securely in her mother's circle as if she had been born in it; no one perceived that more clearly than her father. Her letters to him were a riot of high spirits with occasionally a descent into such abysses of homesickness for him and Kad and Cardinal that his jealous misery was for the time assuaged. There were moments when the impulse to bring her home almost conquered him, but when that mood came upon him, he ended by setting his jaw against it and going for a long wintry walk with the dogs, or else, true to his promise, for a ride on Caliph with the little Ninde boy at his side on Domino.

He had other troubles. Mrs. Dryder and Maroline Spence had apparently united in

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an effort to obtain him for one or other of them, having grown faint-hearted as to the ultimate success of single-handed attack. At times he saw himself wedded to Mrs. Dryder with Maroline permanently established in his household as contributory cause. He perceived with amusement the indignant but ineffectual efforts of Cousin Belle to keep these women at his arm's length; she was no match for them. Besides, she had affairs of her own on hand; it was impossible to secrete any longer the import of the Reverend Austin Brown's constant visits. Cousin Belle bloomed and dimpled so delightfully that Sargent admitted with a sinking heart that she was clearly designed by God and Nature not to be a housekeeper, but a homemaker. He had provided a position for her under his roof with an unacknowledged feeling that he was benevolent; he understood now that perhaps her benevolence had outweighed his.

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It was small wonder that he felt forlorn and that there grew in him a fear that he was about to be deserted by all that had made his hearth his home. He came slowly to a belief that Christina had gone from him for good — whether ultimately to Benny Faber or to some other man he could not tell, though he shrewdly suspected that the chances would presently develop in favor of the other man.

What would there be then for him? Day after day more work, more fame, more money — and more weariness of soul and body.

So he wrote, at a pace that filled Miss Spence with tender alarm and gave her the opportunity for attempted ministrations as to an invalid, such as she believed highly becoming to her and eventually effective with any man, however splendidly cold and famous.

Sargent's only consolation lay in perceiving

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that he regretted nothing, though he understood less distinctly as time went on why he had persisted in sending Christina to Madam Kitty. All that he did understand was that his reasons had been less simple and personal to his daughter than he had supposed. There were moments when he caught glimpses of his mind seething with thoughts of Kitty — Kitty Sargent, and with interrogations as to this strange Mrs. Dicky Warder, of whom, through Christina's letters, he knew at once more and less than he desired. She seemed to be back in his life — a regnant, compelling woman — sweeping past him as he stood shrinking from her in the darkness, a woman of alien philosophy and faiths.

And yet, there were times, confusing, heart-beating moments, brought upon him by a single word, perhaps, in Christina's letter, when Mrs. Dicky Warder was just Kitty to him — Kitty of the primroses.

CHAPTER XII

IS THIS FAR END?

Governor Gregory's big blue touring car was standing at Mrs. Warder's door; it stood there so often that Mrs. Dorchester was impelled first to comment, then to innuendo as to the reason of its persistence, and finally to asseveration.

"It's the little girl. She's cutting her mother out," she averred jubilantly. She had her own reasons for desiring the abasement of Mrs. Warder, for early in Eben Gregory's rise upon the political and social horizon, Mrs. Dorchester had proceeded to collar and tag him as her own, only to discover later that he was an adroit brute with a fancy for a free neck and no woman's initials branded in brass on it. That might

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have stimulated her to still further indulgence in an entirely single-handed romance, but when Gregory proceeded to exhibit a deliberate preference for the society of another woman — no, Sybil Dorchester had no intention of submitting unheard to that slight upon the superior quality of her offerings.

“ My dear, really, you talk as if you had been Gregory’s affianced bride,” said her husband lazily to her one night, after he had listened with the patience of the humorous and self-contented man to a fresh outburst concerning the Governor’s treachery.

“ Edward, please don’t be vulgar. Anything but that. Our friendship was a mistake, of course, but while it lasted it was unique and beautiful, and now that it is past —”

“ You mean mine and yours?” inquired Dorchester mildly. “ I wouldn’t be tragic about it, Sybil. I find you a delightful acquaintance, and so long as we guard ourselves

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against any lapse into undue familiarity — intimacy, I should perhaps say — I see an agreeable future before us. I beg you to avoid putting a serious interpretation upon a relationship which can never be anything but a species of — well, shall I call it joke? — to the mature of heart.”

“Edward!” exclaimed Mrs. Dorchester. “How can you talk so! You wound me deeply when you know that to me marriage is the most exclusive and the most sacred of all human ties.”

“Exclusive! You bet I know it!” Dorchester whistled his terrier Yap to his knee and fondled her and reflected that some fellows were lucky — Nevil with that little boy Donny, for instance. But there was no sense in getting sour over things; ten years ago Sybil Markley had been a great catch for young Dorchester, and she was not to blame because he had agreed with the majority opinion. So he went contentedly on with his

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game of solitaire, a game he recommended so frequently to those suspected of matrimonial disillusionment that he was known among his intimates as Lone Hand Freddy.

Christina was a success; no one doubted that, least of all Christina. She duetted with Ally Budgett and pirouetted all around the Governor — played with any man and was serious with none. Mrs. Warder watched the turning of events with the amused but detached interest that she had learned from Dicky Warder; the stir created among her friends and associates by the advent of Christina was entirely to her liking, the child's father being a man of such distinction that she was conscious of a new and startled curiosity as to her history in a society that had always spoken of her as, "Oh, Mrs. Warder!"

It was a relief to be able to produce a sensation with so little effort; all that was required of her with so active an aide as Chris-

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tina was to sit back and let her part "do" itself. Sometimes it occurred to her as anomalous that the child should, so rapidly and completely, have become so absorbing an interest in her life; she did not love her, why should she? They had hardly two opinions in common; they crossed swords a dozen times a day; and yet she admitted — for like all super-subtle people she had a preference for knowing the exact truth about herself — that the days of the weeks had acquired a new significance for her since the energies and interests of Christina dominated them.

What she did not quite understand was her indifference to the backslidings of her admirers; if they preferred gamboling with Christina to fencing with her, let them gambol! — she watched the game, bored or diverted, but never jealous. Sometimes she was perturbed by a strange feeling of loneliness, but when she sought alleviation in the society of men she knew and liked, she was

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forced to confess to herself that she was lonelier with them than without them. Perhaps the child had come in time to save her from a great blunder; she realized now that she had been close to the admission that Gregory would "do"—that in his political ambitions she would find scope for her own, and that such a marriage had lured her as a species of insurance against the coming of those autumnal years in which beauty and power should still be hers, but upon so short a lease.

At other times she scorned the uplifting in her of the still, small voice of idealism—in her! Gregory might gambol as youthfully as he chose with Christina, but when she was ready, she would marry him, despite those unattached rumors that his political enemies set adrift like fire balloons in the electoral skies—all that was no concern of hers. A bachelor's private life was his own affair, and the loves and marriages of middle age were not those of boy and girl romance. This

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Benny Faber would doubtless bring to Christina the freshness and inexperience of innocent passion—of course he would; she was as romantically determined to believe that as she was cold-bloodedly determined to believe that Gregory, unmarried, owed no accounting of his conduct to anyone, so long as no one claimed public gaze as an injured, inadequately requited recipient of his idle fancies. She thought about Benny a good deal, for Christina never spoke of him without saying something that was an unconscious plea for the boy. It was to be hoped she wouldn't be a fool; girls married with such impossible ideas in their heads. This little fling was rather a dangerous experiment for such an impressionable child, but Benny was clearly a masterful person and able to take care of his own; she had gathered that from the extracts of his letters that Christina read to her.

But after all, the girl had better find out

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something about the big world as it really was; it might save her from undue hankering after it in days to come.

These and many thoughts came and went in her mind while Governor Gregory's touring car waited outside her door, because he must hear Christina play everything she knew on the wild violin that seemed sometimes the true mate of her leaping, witching spirit. Patient Ally Budgett performed impossible feats of accompanying with occasional sighs, but he was in the seventh heaven and knew it, and didn't really care how many composers Christina murdered if only he might murder them with her.

"I want the 'Humoreske,' " said Christina suddenly, pausing in the midst of a bar, and Ally scrambled for the Dvorak as if his life depended upon the haste with which he found it. The girl's mood changed; the plaintive, melancholy eagerness of the little

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piece seemed to pass from her violin into her; the gay face stilled, then paled and flushed; the hint of sheltered tears was in the downcast eyelids. And Eben Gregory watched, while there grew in him the longing to soothe and caress her as he would a frightened child. He glanced at Mrs. Warder, but she sat calm, a slight smile on her lips. He resented that; what tenderness could one be sure of from her to this little dependent thing who, after all, needed a man's strong, protective affection?

"Oh!" With a quick, outbreking sob, Christina thrust her violin at Gregory and turned to Mrs. Warder. "I'm homesick, Madam Kitty. I want father. I want him. I'm going to call him up—this minute. I must. He said I never was to—unless I was ill. And I'm worse than ill. I shall die if I can't speak to him to-night. You don't know what it is to feel like that. But he's my father, and I can't bear it any more. I don't

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mean that you aren't all very kind to me—" Her benevolently inclusive glance annoyed Gregory; he wished Budgett would get out, and not sit there staring at Christina like a besotted owl.

"Tina!" Mrs. Warder's quiet tone and manner were suggestive.

"No! You're not to say no, Madam Kitty! I didn't sleep last night, and I shan't to-night. I wanted him so. And I know he wants me. Don't you see, Madam Kitty? But you don't know what it's like to do without him when you want him. And now—he'll just have stopped writing—he'll be going for that quick little walk before dinner with Kad and Cardinal, and he'll be thinking about me. He'll look up at my window when he goes out— Oh no! he won't, for he'll remember not to, and he'll think that I'll never stand there again watching for him." In her excitement she laid her hand on Madam Kitty's shoulder. "I know he'll be

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thinking that, and I want to tell him that I'm coming soon, and that I love him — oh better and better and better than anybody—except—well, except—” She turned to the door. “You must come, Madam Kitty. You must call him up for me. Don't you see that I couldn't?” She broke into sobs. “If you had read his letter to-day, you'd understand. He hasn't anybody but me, and he thinks—Oh, you will call him up, won't you? I can't. I shall cry. And they'd never know what I wanted.”

Gregory stepped forward. “Please let me.”

“Oh no,” said Mrs. Warder. Her voice was very light and cold. She went out quietly, followed by Christina, to the telephone room. As she sat down and raised her head to the receiver even the girl noticed the whiteness of her face. “Oh Madam Kitty!” she cried. “Are you ill?”

Mrs. Warder shook her head and the next

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moment was saying clearly: "Long distance, please." Then after a silence: "I want Mr. Sargent at Far End." She repeated that several times in her usual calm tone, then turned and said: "We must wait, Tina — she will call us."

They sat still, saying nothing, until the bell rang sharply; a sigh broke from Mrs. Warder, but she spoke at once. "Yes! yes! Is this Far End? I want to get Mr. Sargent — Mr. Iliel Sargent. It's Mrs. Warder, but it's Miss Sargent — Oh, I beg your pardon." She held out her hand blindly, unconsciously, to Christina — this child who was the link between her and the man who was suddenly so perilously near; she had not considered what it would be like to feel his voice so close, and yet it was because of an uncontrollable longing to hear it that she had gone to the telephone at all.

Christina held her breath, curiously subdued by a sense of something beyond her ken

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—something that was happening upon that invisible wire; she looked down at the hand that had grasped hers, delicate and strong, and wondered at the quivering that passed from it into her own.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Sargent. I did not realize that it was you. It is Mrs. Warder speaking. Christina asked me to call you up for her. She is tired and nervous to-night. She cannot be happy unless you let her speak to you. She is here.”

Mrs. Warder stepped back and Christina took her place.

When she looked around, a few moments later, after her first wild burst to her father, she saw that she was alone.

CHAPTER XIII

THE EYES OF A BOY

"Yes, I know, but I can't help it," said Christina fractiously. "I'm sure it doesn't matter a bit how late we are at that old musicale."

"It will annoy Mrs. Planter dreadfully," protested Mrs. Warder. "Going to Moorway Court to a function is always to me like going to church at Saint Peter's and being waited for at the door by the Pope."

"Well, I'm not afraid of Mrs. Planter." Christina tossed her head. "I want to be late now." She took up her pen again and went on with her letter, while Mrs. Warder resigned herself to waiting—and considering Christina. She was aware that the child

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and she had made a striking pair to-day — Christina in her dull pink cloth with a pink felt hat encircled by a long black feather, and she in severely sumptuous black velvet. But they were as unlike mother and daughter in appearance as could be; that suited her. It would have been annoying at this date to find oneself confronted by an understudy who had all the advantages of time and opportunity in her favor. But that was not all. Christina's fair crinkly hair was good to look at; Mrs. Warder had touched it once timidly, the spell of remembrance strong upon her; and Christina's fair flushing skin and straight blue eyes were so wholesome, so divinely young and reassuring. More and more she set the boy, Benny Faber, beside the girl in her mind's picturings,—the boy with the dark head and the "muddled gray eyes" and the idyl of young love singing in his heart. Couldn't the child see that she belonged to him?—that separation from him

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was like the parting of the perfume from the rose?

So she thought as she watched Christina writing at her usual helter-skelter speed—and the next moment she turned upon herself and scoffed. What was the matter with her that she took to driveling sentimentality like a school-girl or a gray-beard? She looked up, suddenly conscious, at the great picture of Dicky Warder that had given him an international prestige because it had linked his name enduringly with that of the artist who had painted it. Sometimes she had a curious feeling that he would one day step from the canvas and set her back where she had been five years before.

“Are you writing Benny?” she asked, as Christina’s speed showed no signs of halting.

“No — father.” Christina glanced up and went on again.

The color came into Mrs. Warder’s face.

“Whatever can you find to say to him?”

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"Everything." The pen flew on.

"I hope you don't speak of me, Tina." The severity of the tone indicated an unpardonable quality in such an offence.

"H'm! To-day it's been all about you," said Christina calmly.

Mrs. Warder stood up. "That's not nice of you, Tina. I credited you with a finer feeling."

Christina surveyed her mother impartially. "I suppose it seems to you like spying. It would be — in most cases. But this seems to me different. I'll read you what I've written if you like." And before Mrs. Warder had time to arrange her emotions, Christina had plunged and was sentences deep in the letter — a letter that held her hearer listening however much against her will.

"I still don't know how to describe Madam Kitty to you, father. I wish you could see her. We'd have a great time talking her over together afterwards. In a way she's

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lovely — when she wants to be — but I can't tell you how. It's all that light, floaty, vanishing kind of thing that you can't pin down in a description. Perhaps you'll understand what I mean when I say that if she comes to my room and sits a while and talks and goes away, she's still there afterwards — you feel as if some strange flower had been in the room and left its color behind. Sometimes I adore her — you can't help yourself — and then I hate her. There are days when she's all scratches and thorns, such dainty ones, and she does things that I loathe. I hate to see her smoke, and she flirts, father — oh, in a wonderful way that's all her own and very misleading."

"Tina!" Mrs. Warder stood back, against the frame of the great picture. "How dare you? You're cruel! It isn't fair! What will your — father think?"

"Oh!" said Christina. She stood up. "Do you care what he thinks? You didn't once."

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Mrs. Warder sat down; she had not expected that. But the next moment she got up and walked unhurriedly to the table; she picked up the closely written sheet and tore it in two. "Send it to him if you like," she said indifferently. "At any rate it carries my contempt of such gossiping with it."

"It shall," retorted Christina, blazing. "And it will make a pretty little story for father. I shall tell him exactly what happened, and what do you suppose he will think of you then!"

Mrs. Warder smiled unexpectedly. "It won't matter, Tina."

"You mean —"

"It doesn't matter what I mean, and you never could guess. And now I won't wait any longer for you, if I may go, dear."

"You may." Christina sat down and rearranged the torn sheet. "I shall not go at all."

But just as Michael was about to drive off,

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she came flying down the steps, and tumbled in upon Mrs. Warder.

"Of course I didn't mean that," she explained. "Though I think you were horrid, and after all the lovely things I had said to father about you!"

"You said there were times when I was all thorns and scratches." Mrs. Warder had difficulty in keeping a smile out of sight.

"So you are."

"And all that about the cigarettes — and —"

"So you do. Oh, I understand," said Christina coolly. "You can take any man away from any woman if you want to, and you know it. You've only given me Mr. Gregory and Ally Budgett because it amuses you more to do that than to keep them for yourself. You needn't think I don't know. What I'm wondering is — what man is it that you've got up your sleeve that I don't know anything about? Because there is one, you

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know. You'd never be so self-denying if there wasn't."

"Tina! You're positively vulgar." Mrs. Warder was genuinely embarrassed.

"I'm often that," said Christina carelessly. "It doesn't worry me. And now for Mrs. Planter."

"Don't look at her as if you didn't like her, Tina. She's none too fond of me as it is."

"Oh, she isn't!" Tina's tone was one of deep offence. "Well, I'll smile at her and just make her like me — you'll see — but it won't be because of her."

The look that Christina flashed at her mother sent Mrs. Warder into "the Presence" with the bloom of a disarming sweetness upon her that paved the way for Christina's adroitest advance upon Mrs. Planter's susceptibilities.

"My dear —" it was Mrs. Dorchester who reached out a long arm and grasped

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Mrs. Warder's elbow — "do sit down here — right beside me. We can talk delightfully. There won't be anything else for five minutes, thank goodness! That Czersch-wonsky or something man has just finished, and I'm perishing to tell you that I'm simply infatuated with your little girl. I can't call her your daughter, dear. I don't believe she is, though of course that doesn't prevent her being Mr. Sargent's, does it? But you're too young — absurdly too young to have a marriageable daughter. We all know that. Really, I consider it one of the most valid arguments against having children — they're a perfect tombstone as to your age. And you see — you may be a grandmother any day."

Mrs. Warder suppressed a smile.

"But as I say, no one could believe she was your child. She's so sweet. I tremble for the men, and really now-a-days the married men are so gregarious — I mean about other

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women. They flock — literally flock — after any new woman. I think it's much more respectable to be a bachelor, because then everybody knows you have no morals and it's all quite right. There's Governor Gregory — " she darted a glance at Mrs. Warder — " the things one hears! Somebody told me the other day that he had a son at Harvard, but I said I thought that was a very good place to have a son, and I think it's tremendously fine of him. I'm sure if all these men put their sons — that sort, I mean — in Harvard — Oh, do look at Mrs. Flatt, and I know her husband lost thousands in the Argenta-Apex squeeze! And there are those people beginning again! How can they think anyone wants to listen to Mozart in these days! I'm all for Strauss — I think music ought to mean something. Don't you? "

Mrs. Warder leaned back and withdrew her thoughts from the people and the things about her to give the clear, intelligible strain

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of beauty a chance to weave its spell upon her mood; she forgot where she was; she forgot the odious woman at her side, and all the others of the gaiety-crazed mob with their billboard clothes and their manufactured faces.

Primroses, yellow primroses — Christina should carry them at her wedding.

But that letter! What would he think she had become?

That was of no importance to her; she straightened herself haughtily.

But what had she become? The question persisted all through the precise, delicious flowing of the music.

Primroses — primroses sweet and wet with the dawn's rain still upon them. And a boy's eyes, blue and straight as Christina's own, looking into hers — plighting there a troth that he believed as enduring as the length of his days and hers.

"Thank God, that's over!" exclaimed Mrs. Dorchester in a tone that was a prayer.

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“Really, what one suffers for one’s friends —!”

“Do you?” said Mrs. Warder most innocently. “Then you must surely sacrifice yourself very generously — one should only suffer for one’s enemies.”

“Now how do you make that out, my dear? But you’re so witty. I must remember to repeat that to Freddy. He thinks you’re quite the most —”

“How charming of him!” said Mrs. Warder, rising from her seat. “Please make to him my most sincere *remerciments*.”

If Christina only would not send that letter!

No! — she wished it to go.

CHAPTER XIV

DICKY WARDER

Christina sat on the broad arm of a library chair, her feet on the seat of it; she was smoking a cigarette and Governor Gregory was watching her and thinking that he had never gazed on such an adorably distracting compound of girlhood in his life. Christina with all her little puritanical reservations had seemed to him the most appealing thing the heart of man could conceive, but the Christina of these later days had possessed herself of attractions that had a slightly pungent flavor all their own. Gregory no longer evaded; he understood what he wanted, and he understood that he meant to have it in spite of Mrs. Warder and in spite of Benny

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Faber. Of course there was the child's father to reckon with, but a man who knew the world as Sargent did could be relied on to see the advisability of something less problematical than a boy and girl marriage for his daughter. The man's own experience was behind him as a gauge of that sort of thing, and though Faber was undoubtedly a fine fellow, it was going to take something more than an undoubtedly fine fellow to handle a piece of fireworks like Christina on a conjugal basis.

But these were days in which Gregory learned the pain of regretting. There were things he would never want little Tina to know — things she need never know. But they were there and they troubled him. For the first time in his hard life he wished for a clean heart into which the eyes of this little girl might safely look. For love had come to him — love as compelling and as tremulous as any boy's, but with the grip of pathos

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that has no place in young love's dreams. He remembered his schemes for an ambitious marriage with distaste; that was what the world did with a man — hardened and degraded him, teaching him the adaptation to self-interest of all that was best in him.

Yet in spite of his amorous preoccupation he was not without speculative question as to the political effect of so youthfully charming a mistress of the State House; Christina as a vote-inducer would be something for his opponents to reckon with.

"Greg, why don't you marry Mrs. Planter?"

"Tina!" exclaimed Mrs. Warder.

"He doesn't mind. He likes it, don't you, Greg?"

Gregory smiled tolerantly.

"You wouldn't like me to call him 'Eben,' would you?" continued Christina. "That would be shockingly intimate. But seriously — about Mrs. Planter, Greg."

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"Tina, come off that chair," said Mrs. Warder unhappily.

"No, no," protested Christina. "There are such a lot of things you can't say when you're behaving properly — things that it's awful to say, and that I simply must."

"If you're in that mood I shall go away," said Mrs. Warder, with a touch of her daughter's manner.

"*Please* not!" exclaimed Gregory. But she passed him.

"Sit down," said Christina impatiently, as Gregory remained standing, looking somewhat uncomfortable.

"But —"

"She'll come back just as soon as she wants to."

He sat down.

"Now, as to Mrs. Planter, Greg?"

"She's ten years older than I am — more."

"There'll be ten years less of her then," remarked Christina consolingly. "And then

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think — ” she looked profound — “ you’ll have that place, and all her heaps and heaps of money, and pictures and statues, and — ”

“ If I could only be sure of that ! ” Gregory was serious consideration personified. “ But she has an immense family connection. I shouldn’t like to try the experiment without a pretty stiff ante-nuptial contract, and she might acquire the suspicion that I was marrying her from a mercenary state of the affections.”

Christina had finished her cigarette and got off her perch, settling herself on a straight-backed chair rather near Gregory.

“ I could talk her into it,” she remarked. “ I will — if you like.”

“ And exactly what would you say ? ”

“ That would depend. At first she would probably be angry, but she couldn’t help being interested. Women are when you talk to them about love and marriage.”

“ Really ? ”

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"Oh yes. And she's taken a fancy to me. She says so."

"That's curious."

In spite of her audacious belief that she had the upper hand, Christina was momentarily embarrassed by the look in Gregory's eyes.

"If women like to talk of love and marriage —"

"With women," she interposed. "Not with men, Greg. There's nothing so dull."

"I understand. Not with men," he repeated coolly. "But with one —"

"Go home," said Christina decisively. She stood up. "You're dreadful. At this moment you look like a definition of matrimony out of the dictionary. Go away."

Gregory went. He had ventured as far as he wished to-day.

But he was no sooner gone than Christina relented. She had been having such a good time; why must she be a silly and spoil it?

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She ran to the window and caught Gregory's backward glance as he steered away; she gravely saluted and the Governor smiled — a smile that Mrs. Dorchester caught in passing as well as the charming picture of Christina, which was the cause of her saying later to Lone Hand Freddy: "It's deplorable, Frederic — that little Sargent minx and Mr. Gregory."

"Oh! Is she —" Freddy paused and chose the refined word — "is she abducting him?"

"Abducting?" She gathered breath.

Lone Hand Freddy looked at her, considering. "Shall you be more than twenty minutes, my dear?" he asked blandly. "I'm expecting Artie any moment."

After she turned away from the window Christina sat down in some depression; she had a feeling that Madam Kitty's door was standing open at the head of the staircase, and that Madam Kitty intended speaking to

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her. Very well; if that was it, she wouldn't go up-stairs if she never went again.

Madam Kitty was waiting, and after she had exhausted her slight patience in that method of passing time, she went down-stairs and found Christina standing contemplatively in front of Dicky Warder's portrait.

"I don't like him," she announced, without unnecessary preamble. "He always makes me think of Rome and the Inquisition and stilettos and the Bridge of Sighs. Did you like him?"

Mrs. Warder went to the extreme end of the room and sat down.

"Of course he's very handsome," continued Christina, "all in that fine knife-y kind of way. He has wonderful hands, hasn't he? They look as if they would enjoy strangling you artistically and gently. And his eyes — they're always after me. I think he doesn't like me here, Madam Kitty."

"I shouldn't think he would," said Mrs.

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Warder coldly. "Not when you act as you do."

"Oh!" Christina sat down; the length of the room was between them.

"I think your head is a little turned, Christina. I'm not sure, as I think it over, that it was a good thing for you to come here. You have begun lately to do some things that I —"

"You mean smoking?"

"For one thing."

"I should like to understand about that," said Christina. "Why is it right for you and wrong for me?"

"That is not a point that you and I will discuss, if you please. Have you told your father that you sit smoking with Mr. Gregory?"

"No, but I've got to," said Christina miserably. "And he'll make the dickens of a fuss, Madam Kitty. Oh, I wish you'd just write and tell him that I'm a bad girl. Then

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he'd get so angry with you that he'd forget about me."

"And Benny?"

"Oh — as to Benny —" Christina's chin lifted. "Benny has nothing whatever to do with it. I don't dictate to him — why should he to me? — why should anybody? If I were a boy —"

"But you're a girl, Tina, and there are, in consequence, some things that I think you had better understand at once, if you wish to save yourself embarrassment and mortification later on. I suggest, for instance, that you do not call Mr. Gregory — what you do call him — any more."

The color flashed in Christina's face. "He likes it, Madam Kitty."

Mrs. Warder considered. "Just how much it is wise for women to do what men like has been found to be a debatable point, I believe." She hesitated. "Tina, don't

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you understand that Mr. Gregory is not the kind of man a girl can play mouse with very satisfactorily? ”

“ I’m not playing with him,” said Christina rebelliously.

“ Then is he playing with you? ”

Christina laughed. “ Perhaps.” She got up and walked towards Mrs. Warder. “ But all the same, I shall marry him if I want to, Madam Kitty.”

Mrs. Warder got up from her chair. “ Shall you? ” she said, so coolly that Christina wanted to slap her. “ I hadn’t thought of that. It might be interesting. But I fancy you would find it dull after a bit. Oh, I must hurry. Marie will be frantic. It’s the Courtenay dinner to-night, and she has ideals as to the impression I am to create.”

“ You think I don’t mean what I said? ” demanded Christina.

“ My dear, how should anyone know? ”

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Mrs. Warder moved with elaborate grace to the door; she was conscious of herself as curiously angry.

"You will see. I shall marry Governor Gregory." The demon of contrariety was fully aroused in Christina. "I should get into the history books then, I suppose. How nice to think of the children a hundred years from now reading about the wife of one of the state's most distinguished governors. I like that." The girl's tone was enough to provoke a saint, but Mrs. Warder was a great advance on anything so primitive.

"Tina, you're quite hollow-eyed, and as nervous as a bat. Do go to bed early, child. It's a case of too many dances altogether."

"As you like." Christina flitted up-stairs before her mother. "But don't forget what I've said."

At eleven o'clock the next morning Joanna asked Mrs. Warder's maid if her mistress was awake.

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"Yes. And she wants to see you at once about Miss Sargent's gown for Wednesday night."

Joanna listened patiently while Mrs. Warder talked about white chiffon and rose-pink ribbons, and when that was all settled she said slowly: "I'm a bit troubled, ma'am. Miss Sargent said she was not to be called until ten — she was tired last night, and Mr. Gregory came in — only for a few minutes —"

"Mr. Gregory!" exclaimed Mrs. Warder.

"Yes, ma'am. And this morning when I went to Miss Sargent's room, she wasn't there. No one saw her go out. But she must have."

"There's nothing strange about that, Joanna. She's only gone for a walk, of course." But Mrs. Warder's tone belied her affectation of indifference.

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“Yes, ma’am. But the traveling-bag she carried when she came has gone too.”

“Oh!” Mrs. Warder sat up at last. “She has gone to see her father then.” To herself she added: “I wonder why.”

And in the instant she felt the sting of this unexplained desertion of her in a way that annoyed and amazed her.

She got up and dressed and went into Christina’s room; it was a charming cage, but to-day its look of orderly desolation was depressing.

This was absurd; she would order the carriage and take Donny Nevil for a drive; he loved to go driving with her. But Donny had a cold — he had been feverish all night, and his mother, who went with her instead, was nervous and preoccupied and anxious to be at home again at the end of fifteen minutes. So after doing a little tiresome and unnecessary shopping, Mrs. Warder went home again herself, and sat through the dull after-

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noon listening for the tempestuous slam of the front door that had so often disturbed her. It occurred to her that she hated the trained stillness of this perfectly regulated household, and she remembered the parlor-maid whom she had dismissed for breaking out into singing as she dusted the drawing-room in the early morning.

Of course there was just one sane thing to do — that was to call up Far End and find out if Christina had arrived there. But she did not do it, though she arranged and rearranged a hundred times each single word that she would say.

Would he do more than accept her message with a perfunctory "Thank you"?

Late in the afternoon a telegram was brought to her. It said simply: "Christina is here. I hope you have not been anxious.—
ILIEL SARGENT."

Then he had not desired to speak to her. For he might have telephoned.

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But late that night she sat long, with the yellow paper in her hand, before she put out the light.

CHAPTER XV

MEN ALWAYS SAY SO

Late the next evening Mrs. Warder was called to the telephone to speak to Mr. Gregory. "I'm at the Bingham's," he said. "May I come in to see you for a few moments?"

She assented with an indifference that was hardly negligible, but he thanked her blithely, and she was barely settled in the drawing-room again when he was at the door.

"I was here the night before last, you know," he said as he shook hands; "but only for a moment."

"So I understood."

"And disapproved?"

She made a gesture. "I have not thought about it, Mr. Gregory."

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"It seemed to you of no importance, then?"

She smiled; the responsibility of Christina was no longer resting upon her shoulders, and she felt that she could afford to play a little with Gregory.

He answered her smile deliberately.

"I came in that night because I was like any foolish boy — I knew I shouldn't sleep unless I saw Tina again, even if it was only for a moment."

His remark indicated to her an arranged policy, as he knew it would. His sense of his dignity as a man and as a governor was great, and he had realized in the last twenty-four hours that he had arrived at a place where there was danger of his making a fool of himself, or being made a fool of. He was in love with Christina, and he understood that his attentions attracted and flattered her, but the wind that blew her to him was as likely as not to blow her from him, light, willful thing

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that she was, unless something strong and determined held her firm.

This way and that he turned his problem until it came to him that there was only one method of dealing with it; Mrs. Dicky Warder must become his ally. Such a proposition would never have occurred to an inexperienced man, for it was only a matter of weeks since he had been actively engaged in the wooing of Mrs. Warder herself. But Mrs. Warder was an unusual woman; she had a rare sense of humor of which she was rather vain; she was capable of a large generosity to the man who appreciated her philosophical indifference to the surprises of the Jack-in-the-Box Providence, who jumped out when the lid flew open and unconcernedly upset the plans of mice and men.

That philosophical repose, however, would not have been sufficient, even in the case of the most rarely humorous of women, to reconcile her to such flagrant disloyalty as Greg-

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ory's; the point was, as he shrewdly and joyfully perceived, that she herself had been indifferent; she would have married him, perhaps, but she would have done so, scoffing at herself and at him for a pair of fools. Now she was free to scoff at him alone; she would do that, but not venomously. And he admitted himself fair game for her shafts; any man would be who, at forty-five, wanted to take to wife a child like Christina, who would probably harass and torment him unendurably. But that was what he wanted; he wanted to be jealous, and happy, and miserable — the driven shuttle-cock of passion like any boy of twenty; he glorified in this rush in his veins of reckless, amorous emotion.

There was only one thing to do: to invite Mrs. Warder to share the secret of his utmost weakness. Once persuaded, she would be a far surer ally than Sargent, who might, after all, manifest paternal idiosyncrasies of

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an obstructive nature — you never could count on men where their daughters were concerned. They were apt to be more romantic and sentimental than the maddest of lovers.

Gregory had no intention of playing a young Lochinvar part in the acquiring of his bride; his imagination waxed warm over the details of a publicly picturesque wooing, and a still more public and picturesque wedding; he conned the story as he would assist the newspapers to present it — the girl-wife with her estranged and notable parents, and the distinguished groom, fortunate alike in love and war — political war.

He had thought it all out, and to-night he had come, strong in the belief of his winning power. Eben Gregory — the name stood for success; the days of probation and defeat were past for him.

Mrs. Warder looked at him with the little smile that mocked. "You couldn't sleep un-

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less you saw Tina again for just one moment," she repeated.

She sat back in a wonderful pose, and it came over him that he had never seen her look as she looked to-night. She was all in black — soft, thin, dull stuff that fell tensely about her, weighted with heavy borders of black embroidery — a gown that reached high about her throat and sleeved her arms to the wrists. It was all and more than Christina could have demanded of her mother, but Gregory felt, in some wonder, that he had never seen this woman in more willfully attracting guise. He knew women well; had he been as certain of Mrs. Warder as he was of all others, he would have said to-night that only one thing was capable of investing her with this cool blue light that made him think of the flames that presage a burning splendor by and by.

As he watched her the same thought crossed his mind that Christina had voiced so

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frankly to her mother. Was there someone else? Had she merely been amusing herself all these weeks that he had deemed her growing acquiescent to a marriage with him that should be a subtle blend of reason and adroit passion?

Yet he had admitted her indifference. Yes; because it suited him to admit it.

Well — if there were someone else — so much the better for him!

"I've come to throw myself on your mercy," he said simply. "If you won't help me, I'm undone." He smiled at the melodramatic word; Mrs. Warder smiled.

"What help do you want?"

"I want that little girl."

She gave him a quick look; if he knew women, she knew men.

"Do you want to adopt her?"

"You're unkind."

"No," she said slowly. Then she laughed; she was thinking how simple a mat-

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ter it would be to unsettle this man's desires; she knew her power. She had let him go without understanding her reason; she could bring him back, even after this confession — even because of it. But she was tired of all that — she was done with it. She had played the silly, purposeless part for long; once, because it gratified the pride of Dicky Warder in possessing her, and later, because all other means of diversion were tame in comparison as methods of smothering the loneliness in herself that she made such desperate effort to ignore.

“No. I'm not unkind,” she repeated. “But I'm not thinking of you — I'm thinking of Tina.”

“Well?” He wished she would talk more and consider less. “So am I.”

She flashed a look at him. “Not much. Not of the real Tina — the woman that's there beneath the child.”

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"Oh yes!" he protested. "That's it. That's exactly what I feel."

She shook her head. "If you did, you would not be asking me to help you make her your wife."

He drew up. "What else does a man desire for the woman —" Then he hesitated. "I can't say these things to you. You make me feel that they sound foolish."

"They do, don't they?" she agreed with discomfoting readiness. "And do you think they should? Do you think they would if they were said by —"

He interrupted her; at this moment he could not bear the boy's name.

"I don't understand you. I thought that you, of all women, were able to rate at their real value the passions of the bib and tucker age — as selfish as the appetite for jam."

"I agree with you," she retorted calmly. "But are yours less selfish? And have you

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as much to offer as — as Benny Faber has?”

“I?” He stared at her. “What has that boy —”

She could not endure it. “Everything in comparison!” She stood up; even in the anger that swept him he paid involuntary homage to the charm that held through all her defiant scorn. “Everything that she needs — my poor little girl! — everything that she must have if she is to become the woman that she ought to be.”

“You!” He checked a sneer. “You say that! — you, who threw away precisely —”

Her hand lifted, and he waited.

“That was it. I threw it away. I didn’t understand, you see. And I had no one to tell me. It meant nothing to me — the love of a boy, clean and strong. I saw only the selfishness in it. And I hated the poverty. I did not see that for me the true marriage and the true motherhood were matters of

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growth and attainment, as they must always be to difficult natures. I thought Iliel simple and uninteresting — he had no fascinating mysteries — nothing to be ashamed of — nothing he would have shrunk from my knowing."

"Every man has that. Every boy has. You're sentimentalizing when you pretend to believe that he hadn't."

"Men always say so," she rejoined calmly. "They ought to know. I will shift my ground to suit your assertion. I will say that I prefer that my daughter should marry a man who has behind him as brief a period as possible for the acquiring of experience not fit for her knowledge. Marriage being what it is, that seems to me the fairer thing to her." She looked straightly at Gregory.

"Your philosophy is derived from your experience as the wife of Dicky Warder?" he inquired suavely.

She flushed, but she answered him in the

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tone she had maintained with slight exception so far. "We need not consider that. Dicky Warder — as you call him — is not accountable for my mischievous theories. I have lived to see where I was wrong, and I will not let my child make a mistake if I can help it. She shall have the romance that her youth has a right to. She shall understand that it comes only once to a woman, and only in one way — that youth must wed youth, and that together she and Benny must work out the salvation that lies beneath the romance. That is her right, and I shall fight for it for her."

"You think then that a life of experiment with a boy who has no settled position to offer her — no settled convictions — is better for her than life with a man who is old enough to have proved most things and to have come to a place where he is at least able to hold fast some that he has proved to be good?"

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“How do I know? — how shall anyone know?” There was weariness in her voice. “All that I do know is that one thing seems to me right and the other seems wrong.”

He thought a moment; then he said: “Why are you so ardently championing this boy? You know nothing of him.”

“I feel as if I knew a great deal. Christina reads me his letters.”

“Oh! — any man can write — when he’s in love.”

“But this Benny can’t. At least not as you mean. He thinks of just two things — Christina and his work. And just now he makes the cardinal mistake of putting his work first, because it is the means by which he will obtain her. She doesn’t understand that. One sees that he is a man more concerned with doing than with thinking. He describes surveys to her and takes her interest for granted. She doesn’t read any of

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that. Lately I have read those pages to her and made her listen. They reveal the boy as she must learn to understand him."

Gregory smiled. "It seems to me I haven't much to fear from Benny."

"Haven't you?" She studied him coolly. "It would seem so, I suppose. But at the root of him, Benny is the born lover."

He smiled again. "But — he is there."

"And you are here. Yes."

"But I do admit—" Gregory went back to the thought upon which he had begun — "that I have a good deal to fear from you."

She was silent, and he watched her, an irritated, baffled feeling growing in him.

"I don't understand you," he said at last. "I have always thought you the wisest woman I knew, and here, in a matter that concerns the happiness of your daughter's entire life, you act more capriciously than any girl."

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She still said nothing; he was not even sure that she listened.

"Really — I wish you would tell me — what are you thinking?" he asked impatiently.

She turned to him — a slight derisive smile on her lips.

"I shall see Tina's father," he retorted somewhat ponderously, and at once despised his lack of humor.

"It will be of no use."

The assurance in her voice stung him.

"Why should you be so certain of that? Do you think that you — do you mean to influence him against me?" He laughed easily.

There was not even the flash he had hoped to evoke in her eyes; he had never seen her so coolly unresponsive, and his annoyance got the better of his judgment.

"You think Iliel Sargent would be predis-

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posed to listen to a plea from you in support of young romance — of its charm? — of its endurance? ”

“ I think so.”

Gregory laughed. “ My dear lady, doesn’t it occur to you that you deceive yourself? ”

She drew up. “ He would listen — if he saw that I believed.”

“ That you believed? What do you mean? ”

She looked at him steadily. “ That I believed — now — that what I threw away was the best that a woman can have.” She leaned back and spread her arms wide until they rested upon the ends of the divan on which she sat; there was unconscious revelation in the gesture; it hinted of the relaxing of long tension.

“ You mean — ” Gregory began and then paused; this woman was not the woman he had known as Mrs. Warder. “ Do you

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know what you mean? Do you understand?—”

She gathered herself together. “I understand,” she said simply.

“Oh no you don’t!” He spoke brusquely. “You’re merely trying another way of amusing yourself.”

She laid her hand on his arm. “I found out to-day. I never understood before.”

“Understood what?” he asked coldly.

“That I love Iliel — that I always have loved him.”

He drew a breath. Wonderful! — the lengths to which women would go in their desire for fresh forms of amorous excitement. Men were content with the more obvious, more accessible methods of enjoyment.

She understood his thought and drew back proudly. “Why should I tell you?” Then her manner changed swiftly. “But I was sorry for you. I wished you to understand why I wanted Tina to have —”

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"Yes — yes," he interrupted; he had no intention of discussing his own case any further with her at the moment. "I'm interested — enormously interested. Do you intend to tell Sargent what you have just told me?"

"Tell Iliel?" The words seemed frightened out of her.

"But you want him to know it," he said, with a touch of contempt that was doubtless brutal, but, after all, this lovely woman was a declared enemy to his hopes; she was not going to spare him — he saw that.

She stood up, and walked a few steps away from him. Then she turned.

"I hadn't thought of that."

"That's not the truth," he said coldly.

She laughed softly — the color in her face in a flood.

A sudden envy of the man Sargent came over Gregory as he looked at her; she would go back to him — for what man could resist

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her? — and they would begin life again together at the flood-tide of a passion beside which the memories of their first rapture would seem but as foreshadowings of this later, deeper joy.

“Well —” he considered — “in the light of what you tell me, your opposition to my marriage with Tina assumes less importance. For I understand that in talking of what you call her ‘right’ — a youthful romance — you are in reality fighting for the integrity of your own — the romance of the girl that you were once and of the boy that Sargent was. At the root —” he looked at her quizzically — “you’re as selfish as I am.”

She smiled. “Just as selfish.”

“You’re worse. If you will forgive me — you’re a fool. You’re letting yourself fall in love with an ideal. It’s the same old trick —”

“I admit it,” she interrupted. “But an ideal is an immensely satisfactory thing to be

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in love with. And if I'm happier as a fool —" She broke off with a shrug; the mocking grace that she had set aside for a serious moment came back upon her, and she looked at him with a faint smile that seemed touched with contempt of herself as surely as of him.

He watched her, wondering. She had said that she loved Sargent. Had she meant it? There were a dozen questions he would have liked to ask. But he remained silent. Mother and daughter! The charm of the one was the charm of the other; with no outward resemblance to proclaim the tie between them, in temperament they were one. For all her wisdom in the ways of the world, this woman had still the recklessness, the superb and undaunted determination to live eventfully that would always constitute her a problem and a torment — however adored — to the man she chose to make her own.

And Sargent — he had known a decade

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and a half of lonely play-writing peace — peace that was threatened at this moment by all the magnificent possibilities of volcanic disturbance.

“ Well — ” Gregory stood up, and held out his hand — “ I may come again as usual, in spite of my intentions? ”

She smiled.

“ And Tina — you’ll give me my chance? ”

She spread her hands. “ Tina went back to Far End this morning. ”

He stared at her. “ To Far End? Why? ”

Mrs. Warder laughed. “ She may have feared too easy surrender, ” she said demurely.

He looked disturbed. “ You’re sure Faber isn’t at Far End? ”

“ Benny? Oh no! Poor Benny is safe in the fastnesses of dear knows where just now. ” She leaned over and struck a chord on the piano. “ The field is yours, my

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friend." And then, with the light touching of another chord, she sang softly: 'For men must marry, and women must weep.' "

"What a cynic you are!" exclaimed Gregory.

But when he reached the door he looked back, in a confused effort to carry away with him some clear impression as to the woman he was leaving.

"Well?" she said — and laughed.

"Honestly —" he ventured — "did you really mean what you said —"

"Honestly!" she gibed. "Is one ever honest when one is driven to the necessity of being serious?"

CHAPTER XVI

THE GOVERNOR'S LADY

"This is the evening of the Valentine party," said Christina irrelevantly.

"Oh!" remarked Sargent. "You were going?"

"Yes — with Ally Budgett."

"There's still time." Sargent looked at the clock. "You could just get the 4:58."

"Yes, if I wanted to."

Sargent went on writing, but with no sense of the inevitable flow of spontaneity that made work a delight to him; he had been looking over his manuscript appalled to find how little he had accomplished in the last week. The descent of Christina upon him had been a matter of no ordinary jubilation; for three days he had partaken of her frenzy

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of excitement in a way that made him feel ten years younger. Mrs. Dryder was routed, and Maroline Spence ceased from her suggestively ministrant labors; the house resumed its old-time high-pitched gaiety of tone, with the glow of many lights at night, and the fire again upon the great hearth in the drawing-room. The doors that had been closed stood open, and Cousin Belle tripped about singing:

“ O Love Divine, how sweet Thou art!
When shall I find my willing heart
All taken up by Thee?—”

and blushed when from a distant part of the house the voices of Christina and Sargent joined heavily in the assertion:

“ I thirst, I faint, I die to prove —”

and then ceased with a concentrated suddenness that was very disturbing to spinsterly reserve.

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But everyone was happy; Kad and Cardinal chuckled in their sleep, and awake they were imbecile in their joy. And the Fabers felt as if it were almost Benny who had come home; they read his letters to Christina, and she read his last one — not all of it — to them, and Mr. Faber said that the next thing would be Benny home again himself and then wedding-bells, of course.

"I didn't contradict him, father," said Christina; "but I know that Benny can't come home — not for ages and ages. He's really Acting Superintendent of the Survey. I suppose that's quite a wonderful thing for so young a man."

"You could go to him," suggested Sargent.

"Yes — I could!" And with that she was in a rough-and-tumble scramble with the dogs, while Sargent wondered about many things, principally perhaps as to Benny's actual knowledge of the girl he loved. He

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had no idea why she had come home — not because she had given him no reason, but because he suspected the genuineness of the delightfully simple and obvious reasons that she offered to him with such engaging frankness. There were depths of perversity in his daughter that he knew it was always safe to count upon.

Presently she settled the dogs and then curled herself up in his big chair, and for some minutes he watched her in silence.

“Really — couldn’t you get on with Madam Kitty?” he asked, at last, very suddenly.

She came out of a dream to answer him. “Anybody could get on with her, father.”

“Oh! I thought from several things you wrote that she was sometimes a little difficult.”

“She’s an adorable person.” Christina spoke with decision. “She gets in tempers, of course, but she’s lovely in a temper. I

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like her that way best. She's so dainty and fine and horrid about it. You hate her, but you admit afterwards that she's never unfair. She understands. She's the most understanding woman I know."

"Really? I hadn't suspected that," said Sargent drily.

"But you see, you don't know anything about her, father. Of course, she did an awful thing, but she was only a girl anyway, and I don't think it matters now, because she simply hates that Dicky Warder."

Sargent laid down his pen. "She hasn't told you so?"

Christina laughed. "That isn't her way. But you'd know. She never speaks of him, unless she has to. She won't even look at his picture if she can get out of it. I've tried to make her. She won't."

"Oh well!" said Sargent, and reflected that there were many things a little girl like Christina couldn't understand; he picked up

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his pen and wrote a page rapidly. Then he laid it down again, and said as suddenly as before: "She never speaks of me?"

Christina considered.

"Oh, of course, she wouldn't," he added hastily. "She would have the good taste not to do that." It annoyed him to think how much Christina knew that she would not tell him, and about which he could ask nothing.

Christina laughed. "Then she has very bad taste. I was thinking—I hadn't thought it out before. Why, she loves to talk about you—or rather to hear me talk."

Sargent felt himself absurdly near to a blush.

"Why—" Christina meditated aloud—"one way and another we talk about you—and around you—a tremendous lot."

The communal "we" caught Sargent.

"Then you mean to go back," he said quickly.

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Christina avoided his eyes. "I don't know. How should I know?"

"Come! We'll go for our walk." And Sargent jumped up. "Which way shall it be?—Sunset Hill road?"

"I don't care."

"I thought you liked that walk best."

"Oh, I do — I do," she averred.

But as she went, laughing with her father and scampering with the dogs, it was not Benny she was thinking of; except in little, quick, poignantly unhappy moments, her thoughts were in Signal street, or at the Valentine party that would be so gay, and at which she would have looked her prettiest she was sure. Sometimes she thought of Governor Gregory, because she had to; she could not manage to forget all the time the single sentence that had frightened her back to her father. It seemed to be always pestering a girl and spoiling her fun — that stupid question of marriage. She liked Gov-

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ernor Gregory — she liked whirling about with him in his big car, she in the seat beside him, and all the town with eyes upon them. Her quick imagination reveled in the spectacular aspects of his fancy for her; she preferred to call it “fancy,” that being a reasonably comfortable word, and occasionally, in spite of her determination against him, and her declared incapacity to contemplate the state of bondage known as matrimony, her mind would slip along the despised path, and lo! — she was the Governor’s lady in a sort of triumphal procession and pageant that should extend through the length of her days.

Benny? Why, of course she meant to marry Benny — some day, when she was old and quiet, and wanted to settle down and rest — when everything had stopped happening.

“Have you written to Madam Kitty?” asked Sargent, a day or two later.

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Christina shook her head. "What should I say?"

"Tina, it's not polite. Of course I supposed you had written."

"You can." She nodded encouragingly at him. "You asked her to take me. She'll expect it. If you don't, she'll think — why, I can't think what she'll think." She regarded him with a severe expression.

"I'm not going to write to her," he retorted sharply. "You and she seem to be very good friends."

Christina leaned forward. "I should think you'd be so glad of the chance to write her," she said, as she studied him. "You'd be sure to get some kind of immensely interesting reply." She yawned, and then sat up suddenly very straight. "Father! Why shouldn't we ask her here?— and Ally, and some of the others? Just think what a time we'd have in this house — every room full,

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and the skating and the sleighing, and the evenings! Oh! this place is meant for that kind of thing. Do let us do it!"

Sargent regarded his daughter. "You think she would come?"

Christina laughed. "Well — at any rate, she'd be crazy to. Of course she's simply dying to see you."

"To see me?" Sargent sealed and addressed a letter and then said: "What makes you think she would care to see me?"

Christina's face dimpled with merriment.

"I know how I should feel."

"It doesn't follow —"

"Yes it does. Glory! What a frenzy she's been in to know what I've been saying to you about her."

"Oh! Do you think that would interest her?"

Christina cast a withering look upon him.

"Well, for a man and a play-writer to ask

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a question like that, and yet they say you do your women well! ”

Sargent laughed; he felt that so far he had managed very well. “That was absurd, Tina. A woman is always interested to know what’s said about her, especially to a man.”

“Of course,” assented Christina companionably. “I know there are things she won’t want me to tell you.”

“Ah!” Sargent lighted a cigarette. “Have one?” he asked, on a sudden impulse — and held his case out to her.

Had Christina been, by nature and training, less at home with her father, she would have been both consciously and unconsciously on her guard. As it was, her hand went out — then shot back.

“I thought so,” said Sargent quietly.

Christina sprang up; she threw the cigarette-case to the other end of the room; then,

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as there seemed to be nothing else to do, she sat down and looked vengefully at her father.

"Well?" he asked, contentedly puffing.

"It was a mean trick," she stormed.

He laughed. "Confess that it was a neat one," he cajoled.

For a moment she held out; then she struggled with laughter.

"It was darned neat," she owned ruefully.

"And I meant you never, never to know."

"Did you think I should object?"

She nodded.

"'Tisn't like me to object."

"No," she admitted, as if it were "Yes."

He smoked for a few moments in silence; then he said: "It's so irrational — to object. There isn't any argument in favor of it for a man that doesn't hold good for a woman. But — my mother didn't, Tina."

"Madam Kitty —" began Christina unhappily.

"You were very hard on her about it — in

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one of your letters — not so many weeks ago."

"I know," she said miserably. "And I made her wretched about it. You remember — that was the letter I sent you — the one she tore in two."

"I remember."

How should the child know that that letter had a value all its own to him, because — but reasons were obscure, perfunctory things, and he knew himself as an illogical person who got on very well without them.

"You see," continued Christina, "that's the kind of thing she hates you to know about her. It was rather mean of me to tell you — for I don't believe she's smoked a cigarette for weeks. I actually believe she's stopped. That's temper, of course."

"Has she other sins equally heinous?" Sargent saw himself becoming the lowest of sneaks, but once in a life-time there were things a man must know.

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"Of course she can't help being a flirt," said Christina, reviving.

Somehow Sargent could not take that up, but neither — as he found presently — could he leave it alone.

"Naturally a great many men go there," he observed. "Madam Kitty is an attractive woman."

"No—not so many. You see—they're all rather special men—the sort she lets come."

"Gregory — you used to speak of him quite often in your letters, but lately you've hardly mentioned him."

"Haven't I?"

"Does he still go there as much as he did?"

"I suppose I haven't mentioned him because I got so used to seeing him, and there's nothing new to say about him."

Sargent smoked and pondered, with the result that at last he plunged. "Is Madam Kitty going to marry him?"

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"Madam Kitty marry Mr. Gregory? Oh, I don't think so," said Christina slowly. "I don't think she wants to."

"I should think it would be rather a desirable marriage for her." Sargent's tone indicated a fine benevolence in regard to Mrs. Warder's future. "Gregory is a big man, and while he is a politician through and through, he has managed to be a reasonably clean one. I should think marriage with him would appeal to her ambition."

"I don't see why you are so determined to marry her to him," said Christina, a trifle sharply. "I don't think it would be nice at all. I think she has been married enough."

"There is that view of it. But a woman of forty — and a handsome woman —" He went on with his thinking.

"Perhaps Governor Gregory doesn't want to marry Madam Kitty," said Christina presently in rather a light voice.

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Sargent laughed. "Perhaps not. Gossip says otherwise, Tina."

Christina's color rose. "All right. But he doesn't."

Sargent's smile scoffed. "Did she tell you that? Child, that's a woman's way when she's making up her mind whether a man shall marry her or not."

"But Governor Gregory doesn't want to marry her," repeated Christina.

Sargent looked at her.

"He wants to marry me," added Christina with lofty gravity.

Sargent laid down his cigarette. "*You!*"

Christina nodded. "And I think I shall marry him. That's what I came home to think about." She stood up, and added with elaborate indifference: "I must go now to Cousin Belle. She said she had something to tell me. I wonder if it's about Mr. Brown."

"Sit down, Tina," said Sargent.

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She sat down.

"Now tell me about this."

"There's nothing to tell."

He looked at her for a few moments in silence, his thoughts supplying what she withheld.

"And Benny?"

She pouted.

"I thought you thought you cared for him."

"I do."

"Then what in thunder — Why, this man Gregory is as old as I am."

"Lots of girls would marry you, father."

"Well, I'm not a fool. I don't want to marry them."

"No," said Christina sweetly. She curled up in the big chair, looking perversely innocent — she had on a childishly simple blue frock, and her hair was in a state of bewitching disarrangement.

"But what does Madam Kitty say?"

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Sargent realized that he was merely helplessly beating the air in asking questions, but before he set his foot down, as of course he intended to set it down, it was well to understand on what basis this utterly absurd condition of things was supposed to rest.

"She says I'm a foolish girl," replied Christina serenely.

"You didn't —" began Sargent, and then paused.

Christina's eyes sparkled. "No, I didn't. She gave him to me. She didn't want him any more."

Sargent reflected. "You'd better find out why she didn't want him. It's probably for a reason that should be sufficient for you."

Christina shook her head. "She hasn't any reason against him that amounts to anything. She just didn't want to marry him, because she probably does want to marry somebody else."

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"Oh!" Sargent lit another cigarette.

"Who's that, then?"

"Ah! she's too clever to let you know that, father. But there's someone. I know."

"Of course there is." Sargent spoke irritably. "There always is with that — with some women." He got up, kicking aside a foot-stool, and began to pace the floor in a way that Christina knew well. "I don't see what difference it makes to him," she thought.

"See here, Tina —" He stopped and looked at her. "I don't like it. I don't want you married to anybody. You know that. But this — I don't like it, that's all. 'Tisn't the thing for a little girl like you. Gregory ought to be ashamed of himself. Now Benny — if you must get married, and of course you must, sooner or later — after all, there's something wholesome and inevitable in a girl's being willing to marry Benny. But Gregory — No, it won't do."

"You're exactly like Madam Kitty," said

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Christina composedly. "You're romantic — that's what's the matter with both of you."

"Both of us! — romantic!" Sargent looked disgusted.

"Now I'm not. I love Benny. But there wouldn't be anything exciting in marrying Benny. We'd be poor for years, and I'd have to live in all sorts of weird places, and I'd be bored to death."

"A woman is never bored when she's with the man she loves," said Sargent severely.

"Rats!" exclaimed Christina. She climbed out of her chair. "I really must go to Cousin Belle. And don't talk to me about this. It won't do any good. You've always said that marriage was a ridiculous contrivance, and that people took it altogether too seriously. And that's just what I think, so I'm not going to be serious about it. I'm going to marry Governor Gregory, but I'm not going to think about him at all."

"See here —" Sargent laid his hand

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rather heavily on Christina's shoulder —
“you can't marry a man on that basis, Tina.”

“But I'm going to — cross my heart, butter my toes, and kiss a cabbage!”

“Listen to me, Tina. When you're his wife — the mother of his child, perhaps—”

“Never!” Christina blew lightly on her finger-tips. “Besides — there'd always be Benny in reserve. That's what I'm keeping him for.”

CHAPTER XVII

MATRIMONY BY LEASE

Sargent stood, a picture of dismay, in the middle of the room; he had an open letter in his hand.

"Well," remarked Christina, looking in at him, "you have all the aspects of a smitten creature."

"Come here!" He looked at her severely. "I wish I had never been such a fool as to send you to Madam Kitty."

"I don't. But 'tisn't my fault that you did."

"You see the result," he accused. "I write a polite letter explaining your impolite disappearance, and hinting, as you insisted that I should, that you had an idea of returning for a brief visit. She replies—" he

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waved the letter at arm's length, but when Christina approached to take it, he drew back —“ saying that she is unwilling to receive you again unless I will bring you to her myself, and indicate just what policy I wish adhered to in regard to you.”

“ Well — bring me,” said Christina.

“ Tina ! ”

“ When shall we go?— to-morrow? No. Heaps of my things are in the wash. How funny that is! I never thought of The Wash all the time I was away, but Cousin Belle worships it in capital letters for exactly one half of every week. Still, they could be expressed to me. Yes. Let's go to-morrow.”

Sargent cast upon his daughter a look that would have blighted a person of less hardy temperament than Christina.

“ Now, what is it? ” she wheedled. “ You want to see her, don't you? I can tell you,

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you'll be everlastingly sorry some day if you let such an opportunity slip."

"I'm surprised at you, Tina. I should have supposed that even you could have perceived the gross impropriety —"

"Impropriety!" Christina scoffed. "You leave that to Madam Kitty. She doesn't do things that aren't proper."

"That is, of course, a matter of opinion," said Sargent loftily. "There are probably a great many things that she does that you know nothing about. A woman who is thinking of marrying —"

"I didn't say marrying, I am sure," protested Christina. "I said I thought there was someone she likes. That's quite different. And I think you're horrid, father! You're talking about Madam Kitty as if you knew exactly the sort of woman that she is, and you don't know at all. Madam Kitty's a good woman — I don't care what you say."

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"She was always that," said Sargent perversely.

"Listen!" Christina sat down on his knee and took his chin in her hand. "You're not nice, are you? You're calling Madam Kitty names —"

"I? — calling her names?"

"That's just what it comes to. If you saw her, you'd understand. You'd probably fall in love with her, just like any other man."

Some strange exclamation escaped Sargent's lips.

Christina smiled. "Yes, but you would — if she wanted you to. Do you suppose Governor Gregory would ever have looked at me, if she had cared to keep him? P-f-f! Poor little Tina!" She looked at Sargent, considering. Then she said, suddenly: "Father, what did you let Dicky Warder have her for?"

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed Sargent, putting her off his knee. "*Let him!*"

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"Of course you let him. My! If I was Madam Kitty, I'd never forgive you. All you had to do was just to keep her. He had to get her. And I bet you it wasn't easy."

"Tina, you don't understand."

"No, I don't. And I'm sure Madam Kitty didn't either."

"Well —" Sargent spoke slowly — "if it's come to this, you had better go back to her. Apparently all your sympathies are with her."

Christina ignored the remark. "My! but she does want to see you badly."

"I don't see any overwhelming evidence of that here," said Sargent, looking at the letter. "It's very brief and business-like."

Christina laughed. "Madam Kitty isn't as simple-minded as you are. At this moment she's absolutely rioting in the thought of seeing you. Fancy! — one's ex-husband!"

"You are a flippant, ignorant girl, Tina,

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with ideas that you ought to have more reserve of feeling than to express in regard to — to your parents.”

“Parents!” echoed Christina. She went off into a peal of laughter. “You don’t seem to me any more like parents, either of you, than two children. Now don’t pose, father. Mr. and Mrs. Faber are parents, but you and Madam Kitty — Oh no, no! She isn’t a mother — she doesn’t know how to be. Sometimes I’ve looked at her and tried to imagine me her baby. It won’t work. I don’t believe she ever really had me. And yet she loves Donny Nevil. It’s queer. Sometimes I’ve been almost jealous of him. She has sweet little ways with him. Yes, it’s queer. You’ll understand when you see her.”

“I shall not go,” said Sargent stiffly. “If I had thought for a moment of doing so, I could not after the impossible things that you have said. And I may as tell you that I don’t intend you to go either.”

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"Oh! Very well."

Christina's tone was so cloyed with filial devotion that her father looked at her in sudden suspicion.

"Now, Tina —"

"Why, of course I shall go," she said calmly. "I can't stay away. I love Far End, but it's so dull, father. I've seen nothing but old men for two whole weeks, and —"

"I thought you preferred them."

"No. I like them just in their prime, isn't that what you call it?"

"See here —" Sargent recognized that this was a time when he must act the parent no matter how badly he did it — "do you realize, that if you marry that man, you may have to live with him twenty-five years, and that he'll be a gibbering grandfather when you're in your prime?"

Christina shook her head. "I wouldn't undertake to live with anybody twenty-five years. I've thought it out. I'm going to

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have him draw up a contract for one year's —"

"Lease," suggested Sargent.

"— Renewable at my —"

"— Pleasure."

"Yes — at my pleasure."

"Go ahead," said Sargent. "You're safe."

"Oh! You think he won't."

"He's sure to. Think of the advertising!"

"You mean —" Christina paused in indignation.

"He's a politician," observed Sargent. "It would be such a pretty story for the public. What a time you'll have with the reporters."

Christina tossed her head. "I think it's a much too serious thing to laugh about," she said with dignity, and Sargent, looking at her, whistled and said no more. He was aware that the matter threatened to develop into a

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thoroughly annoying affair, and he wished he could have discussed it with someone else — someone who understood Tina. But that was impossible.

“Of course if you won’t take me to Madam Kitty —” she said later in the day—

“You need not rush upon conclusions, Tina,” he said coldly. “Of course I shall take you to Madam Kitty.”

She looked at him in amazement. “But you said —”

“What one says is not of the least significance. It’s what one means.” And he called the dogs and went alone for a walk.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN MY LADY'S CHAMBER

Christina met Joanna carrying a breakfast tray through the upper hall—it was the morning after her return to Signal Street.

“Oh Joanna, is Madam Kitty awake yet?”

“Indeed she is, miss, and looking like a rose off the same stem with yourself for its bud.”

Christina smiled approval. “I wonder whether she’s sorry I’ve come back, Joanna.”

“Sorry? Well, by all the tokens, visible and to be seen, that is, I should say she was—not,” said Joanna.

“Then, Joanna, there’s a dear—please ask if I mayn’t come in while she’s having

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breakfast. I tried to stay awake until she got home last night, but I couldn't."

"Well, I'll try it," observed Joanna cautiously. "But I've told you before that she's never quite as happy with herself before eleven o'clock as she is after twelve."

Joanna went away, and presently came back smiling. "You may go, miss. She seemed quite agreeable to the idea."

Christina paused on the threshold. "Father said I was to apologize with the first breath I drew inside this house — for running away, you know, without a license."

Mrs. Warder laughed. She was grateful to the girl for this unconventional salutation; as she had heard her step outside the door a fear had assailed her that Christina might expect to be kissed, and at the moment she could think of nothing more appalling to her. There was between them no near-drawing relation as mother and daughter, yet the fact that they were such occasionally rendered

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the barrenness of their association uncomfortably obvious.

"My! but you're a picturesque person in bed," exclaimed Christina, sitting down and surveying her parent with frank interest.

"I dare say. You know what they always say of the Sprague girls — that they should be seen in a ball-room — and nowhere else."

"Horrid things!" remarked Christina calmly.

"Oh! do you think them appreciably different from me?"

"Madam Kitty! They're vulgar!"

"Well?"

"But you couldn't be — not even when you're your very worst."

They laughed and Mrs. Warder said: "It takes so little art to look pretty in bed that I've always wondered why women don't accomplish more with so much opportunity."

"That's it, I suppose," flashed Christina. "It takes little art, but more nature."

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They laughed again; then Christina said: "You know father is coming to see you this afternoon."

"Yes. I had a note from him — yesterday? No, on Monday. I suppose he is at the Lorraine."

"Yes. But he's very cross."

"Because he's at the Lorraine?"

"No. Cross at me, and cross at his play, and cross at Cousin Belle because she's going to marry the minister."

"That's unfortunate. But if she's ever going to get married —"

"That's what I said. But he called them a pair of condemned fools. He's in that kind of mood."

"Oh! But why is he cross about his play?"

"Well, you see, it's all wrong. Title and everything. I told him I liked the title, and he said, of course I did — that all a fool play-writer needed was to get the word

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'marry' into his title — this is called *When a Maid Marries* — and all the fool women would pack the play-house."

Mrs. Warder smiled. "He does seem in a bad way. But why is he cross with you?"

"What are you going to wear this afternoon?" asked Christina abruptly. "Are you going to look very pretty?"

"Must I make a particular effort?"

"I want you to look lovely."

"But why?— why?"

"Well—" Christina looked so profound a picture of wisdom that Mrs. Warder hid a smile — "do you think father has had what you could call a happy life?"

Mrs. Warder turned and piled the pillows higher behind her head. Then she said in a voice that cooled with each word: "I have never thought about it."

"Neither had I until I looked at him in the train yesterday."

"He has fame and wealth."

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"Yes. But I suppose nobody cares much for that when they have it, do they?"

"I do," said Mrs. Warder promptly. "I wouldn't be without a grain of my small fame, or a dollar of my money for anything."

"I wonder. I dare say." Christina considered. "But of course you're a queer sort of woman."

"I'm not at all queer."

"Well, don't let's fight about that, because we shan't agree," said Christina consolingly. "I think you're just like me about those things. I love money and power and all that, but most women are too feeble-minded to appreciate those privileges except when they mean more cut glass and a more extravagant brand of millinery, and it's really —"

Mrs. Warder burst out laughing.

But Christina took no notice of that; she was absorbed in her own imaginings. "Well, at any rate, you can't imagine a man like father caring anything for wealth and fame

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because it is wealth and fame. And when I looked at him yesterday it just came over me that he's had a pretty lonely time, and when I'm married it's going to be fearful. The end of it will be that he'll be simply driven to marry Mrs. Dryder."

"Mrs. Dryder?"

"She's very pretty," said Christina extenuatingly. "And she may be nice, but I think she's a fool. Still if he marries her, I suppose I shall have to put up with it."

"Well—" Mrs. Warder spoke after rather a long silence between them — "I really don't see what all this has to do with your wanting me to look my loveliest this afternoon."

Christina leaned forward, her small, serious face resting on her hand. "Somehow, I'd like father when he sees you to think that you're very beautiful and very good and very sweet. I think he'd feel better — he wouldn't be so sorry to remember how he had loved you —"

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"Oh! Then he hates me, I suppose?"

"Of course he does."

"Of course?"

"Well —" Christina felt that she had a right to be justly indignant — "what else could any man do? You didn't expect him to love you, did you?"

Mrs. Warder's eyes danced. "To be quite honest — undoubtedly I did."

"Now what do you mean by that?" mused Christina. "No man could, Madam Kitty, after the way you acted."

"Then what has he to be aggrieved about? If he only loved me as long as I — loved him, then his love wasn't worth any more than mine. And all those eternal things that he said that morning in Overshot Wood, little girl —" Mrs. Warder blew a light breath across the tips of her fingers.

"Overshot Wood! How darling it sounds!" exclaimed Christina. "Where was it? You see, I don't know anything. It's

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funny not to know how your father and mother fell in love."

"Overshot Wood," repeated Mrs. Warder. "'Tisn't like any other wood in all the world. Primroses grew there — yellow English primroses, the sweetest flower there is!"

Christina nodded. "I know," she said gravely. "They're wonders."

"You shall carry them at your wedding," said Mrs. Warder lightly.

Christina's eyes clouded with tears. With her usual inconsistent constancy her thoughts flew straight to Benny. Of course you could carry primroses at your wedding if you married *Benny*, but —

"Oh, you must go." Mrs. Warder looked at her watch. "I have heaps of things to do —"

"But I think you might have said that you knew he wouldn't marry Mrs. Dryder," protested Christina.

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"But he will. Of course he will. And you and I will give the groom away, little girl."

Christina stamped her foot.

Mrs. Warder laughed. But as Christina prepared to leave the room, she added indifferently: "I suppose your father has a great many women friends."

"Heaps!" said Christina emphatically. "He's a besieged man. Letters and photographs by the pound. Sometimes he reads me the letters, but not always."

"Oh!" remarked Mrs. Warder, still more indifferently.

CHAPTER XIX

HER HUSBAND EMERITUS

Mrs. Warder remembered — because she needed the remembrance — that it had often been said to her that the one spot which perfectly became her was her own smoke-gray drawing-room.

She came slowly, with a vague sense of descending a shifting flight of stairs, yet she came calmly, and when she reached Sargent — Sargent, who had not moved a pace to meet her — she held out her hand, smiling faintly, momentarily.

“It is very good of you to come,” she said.

And Sargent touched her fingers, murmuring that it was his pleasure.

“Where will you sit?—here?” She indi-

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cated a chair, seating herself near him, and began on the subject of his call with frankly confidential directness. "I meant to have talked more to Tina before you came, but I was out late last night and did not see her until this morning, and then we talked about all sorts of things — I can hardly remember what — instead of about the one thing that was on my mind."

"Yes?" Now that he was here, Sargent wondered what had possessed him to come — to the house of Dicky Warder; he had not thought of that until the moment of crossing the threshold. And this woman! — it was a pretty gown, a simple, blue silk, girlish-looking thing, and she had doubtless studied a part to match it. Well, it would be interesting to watch her work it out.

"You see —" she went on — "perhaps I don't understand Tina as you do, or perhaps I understand her better."

"Perhaps you do," he admitted. "But

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how are we to be sure?— the deeper question being, what is it that is Tina?"

"Oh! but that is simple."

"Is it?"

"Yes." She glanced at him in a puzzled way; her little airs were very effective. "Of course I want to be sure I am right. I think I am, but I want to know exactly how free a hand you are willing to allow me in dealing with her."

"But one can't 'deal with ' Tina," he said, half-smiling. "That is just it."

"Can't one?" She smiled openly.

"Oh no! If her mind is once made up — she's off."

"Then she has come back determined to marry Governor Gregory?"

"I think so."

"Well —" she paused — "what are you doing about it?"

"What am I doing? There's nothing to do."

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"Then you approve?"

"Approve? How could I?"

"Why couldn't you?"

"You don't," he said stoutly.

She smiled. "We're talking about you."

"Oh well!—" he leaned back in his chair—"the thing is preposterous. Forty-five and nineteen. That little girl and a man like Gregory! She doesn't understand, but we know —" He stopped short.

"She's certainly a most distracting combination of innocence and cynicism," said Mrs. Warder lightly, "and if you attack her on one count she shifts to the other with disconcerting agility."

"She does," he admitted. "Of course she is going to be eternally true to Benny, which she will prove by marrying Gregory."

They smiled together; then Mrs. Warder said: "Naturally she will marry Mr. Gregory unless you prevent it."

"I prevent it?"

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She laughed. "Do you really feel as helpless as that?"

"Don't you?"

She shook her head.

"Well!" He rested contentedly on the word.

"But as I said, I must understand." She looked at him steadily. "If I am to do anything, it must be with your entire co-operation and approval."

"Oh, of course."

"Well! Then I am to understand that you distinctly disapprove of the Gregory affair."

"Distinctly."

She laughed softly. "It's quite foolish and quixotic, you know. I don't think there is another father in this town who wouldn't accept Governor Gregory for his daughter with open arms."

"I dare say," said Sargent, a trifle haughtily.

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“And you disapprove because she is nineteen and he is forty-five?” she asked, in a thinking voice. “Does that seem to you a good and sufficient reason?”

“There are plenty of other reasons. I have heard it hinted that Gregory is a man with a past.” He let the sentence stand, unrelieved, with some curiosity as to what she would do with it.

“I suppose so,” she said calmly. “But I think it hardly fair to hold that against him. I believe he has not broken dishonorably with his past.”

“He has not broken with it — dishonorably?” Sargent’s tone invited explanation.

“The boy is at Harvard,” she answered coldly. “That is the best thing I know about Governor Gregory. A woman might well marry him on the strength of it.”

He was silent a moment; then he said: “But not Tina.”

“No — not Tina.”

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An instant of embarrassment rose between them; Sargent's gaze traveled about the room — and still traveled as she volunteered no rescuing remark, until in desperation, he observed: "It's a curious tone for a room — this —and such a self-sufficiency of it."

She looked about as if newly considering it. "I suppose it seems so." Then she added: "The house was decorated with the idea that it should be a setting for me." She glanced at him with flinty eyes, glad to retaliate with a remark that would offend him; that sentence as to Gregory's "past" rankled.

The reference to Dicky Warder seemed to him so inexcusable that he let it fall between them, giving her merely a look that though casual was expressive.

Or so she felt it, and a faint color came into her face. But she reminded herself that she owed this Iliel Sargent nothing; there was evidently little left in him of that Iliel whose memory Gregory had accused her of guard-

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ing in her fight for the rights of Benny Faber.

That reminded her. "And as to Benny?"

"Benny?" Sargent considered. "You think that if it isn't Gregory it must be Benny?"

"I think that if it isn't Benny it will be Mr. Gregory. Don't let us waste time arguing that. All I want to know is that you don't disapprove of Benny."

"I don't disapprove of him," said Sargent, almost regretfully.

"Well then!—" she sat up very straight—"I know what to do."

"But really—" he protested—"why do want to drive her into marrying Benny?"

"She'll never be happy unless she does."

"I don't think so." He spoke decidedly. "Her feeling for Benny is mere youthful capriciousness. And I think he is quite too young to understand a great deal that he needs to understand if he would make a success of marrying Tina."

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"He must learn."

Sargent smothered an exclamation. "Men don't do that."

"They don't — except —" she broke off.

He looked sharply at her, wondering, and the next moment despised his imbecility in supposing her capable of any form of regret. She was a lovely, cold-blooded woman, even now involved in a fresh affair with some man; there was inherently nothing of the wife about her; she was the spinner of webs, the destroyer, the power eternally unconquered that men feared — and adored.

"I don't quite see what we are talking about," he said, in a detached voice. "You appear to think that Tina really wants to marry Benny. Then why doesn't she? There is nothing to prevent her doing so."

"That's it."

Sargent looked annoyed. "I suppose it is puerile to make remarks about the inevitable contradictiousness of women."

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"I suppose it's unnecessary to make remarks about the inevitable obtuseness of men," she answered, unsmiling.

"But Benny —"

"Oh, poor Benny, he's a deplorable example. He loves Tina with all that he has to love with, and she knows it. It never crosses his mind that she might finally throw him over — and she knows it. He couldn't believe, if the Angel Gabriel swore it to him, that she would ever let another man make love to her, and he takes it for granted that, being the pledged mate of his soul, she is enamored of the United States Survey because he happens to be its slave, which he is because he understands that the harder he works the sooner he will have Tina. That's Benny, and anything finer or stupider may the heart of woman pray to be delivered from!"

She ended in a blaze, for which her indignation against Benny seemed harder to account, and Sargent reflected, with an admirable sense

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of detachment, that this was the kind of thing you must expect from woman, whose emotional nature courted emotional crises as a species of ultimate sedative — a fact rarely understood by the involved male.

Having thus plumed himself, he said genially: "What would you have Benny do?"

"I shall think that out," she flashed.

He reflected that he had come little in contact of late with a woman of this type; it was inevitable that he should over-rate her attractiveness. There was something rather fascinating in her willful self-assurance; it was clear that she had no fears as to her ability to arrange the fates of these two children for their own and everyone else's ultimate good.

"What I don't understand," he remarked, "is your devotion to Benny's cause, especially as you consider him fine, of course, but stupid."

"*Il faut s'amuser!*" she retorted.

There was a moment's silence; then he said:

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“Not when it’s a question of — of Tina’s future, surely.”

“Your daughter!” She drew herself up. “My daughter, you mean. What good are you to her now? You are worse than nothing. You would stand still and let your resignation to a thing that I should call a crime be taken for granted. When I ask you what you are doing to prevent this marriage you say to me, ‘Doing?’” — she mocked his tone. “Well, you shall see — you shall see what I will do.”

“Then when you said you were amusing yourself —” Sargent stood up, so did she; they were on fair fighting ground at last, and each glad of it — each remembering the unsettled score between them.

“I lied,” she flamed — “lied! You’re just as fine and just as dense, Iliel, as you were twenty years ago.”

His face paled. “Then will you tell me

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just what is your reason for desiring the marriage of Benny and Tina?"

She stepped back from him, laying her arm along the back of a chair.

"I believe in love," she said quietly.

"Love!" he echoed. "You? Yes! the kind of love—" He glanced about the room.

"No," she answered. "The kind there was between you and me when you did love me, Iliel—the only kind that's worth anything—the kind that some day Tina must know she has, and that I will help Benny Faber to give her."

He stared at her. "You believe in that? But you—"

"Yes, I ran away from it. Because it had grown dull—because you took no pains to keep it bright. I was a child—I wasn't twenty, and I didn't understand. I wanted a lover's love—not a husband's. I wanted to

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be told every day that I was lovely and adored. It was silly, wasn't it?" But her lip quivered.

"You knew all that," he said, stung to a futile plea.

"Knew it!" She looked at him with open scorn. "What was that compared with hearing it?" Still looking at him, she smiled, but he felt the bitterness in the smile. "But I didn't have to depend on you, did I?—and I wasn't twenty. I had to be amused—you understood that—and so—" she tossed out her hands—"you let me be amused. You did by me just as you would do now by Tina—you would stand by and let her marry Gregory, who would treat her as a toy, and then some day my little girl would learn what her right had been—the right she had been cheated of—and then, if she went to you—you, who ought to have known, whose business it was to protect her against herself—"

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“Kitty — you aren’t just to me.” The note of suffering was deep in Sargent’s voice. “You forget that I was only a boy. You forget that I didn’t understand. You forget that I was satisfied because you were my wife — because my child was in your arms.”

“I understood all that,” she said wearily. “That was just the bitterness of it. That is what a man never understands. He never understands that, at first, to a girl of romantic ideals, marriage is a dethronement. But what does it matter? Don’t let us talk about it. All that does matter is that you gave me to Dicky Warder —”

“I — gave you to Dicky Warder? How can you say such a thing?” Yet he remembered Tina’s accusation.

Mrs. Warder laughed. “You handed me over to this —” she looked around the gray drawing-room — “you let me go into a life where I was framed like a picture, and

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adorned like a king's favorite"—she stood back—"and I will never forgive you for it, Iliel—never!"

"Kitty—you are cruel! I let you have what you wanted, and it has ruined my life—"

She came towards him, her hand outstretched—smiling, sweet of look; the sudden change bewildered him. "I'm sorry," she said gently, "so sorry. Good-by. It was wonderful of you to come."

He watched her go, gracefully calm as she had come, unable to think of a word to recall her.

But she had said that he was to blame; it was intolerable. As he went out he passed the library where the great portrait of Dicky Warder hung. It was as if his enemy stood again before him in the flesh. Strange, unintelligible passions seemed to break loose in him. This man had taken her from him—the girl Kitty, his wife.

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He went back to his hotel, and then to the station, and all the way to Far End, and further, there remained with him the sting of that faint, Venetian smile,— the smile of the man who had beaten him in the sorest of all conflicts.

CHAPTER XX

MISERY IN SCARLET

Mrs. Warder sat reading a long — a very long letter, when Christina came into the room like a whirlwind.

“I’m all ready for the sleigh-ride,” she said, “and don’t I look stunning?”

“Very! That is, as stunning as such a very little person can look.”

Christina pouted. “I’m sure all this scarlet — a big woman couldn’t wear it at all. Anyway, my toque’s a triumph. Don’t these fur streamers tie deliciously under my chin?” At this moment she caught sight of the letter, which Mrs. Warder held under her hand.

“Why — that looks like —” Christina came close — “’t isn’t Benny’s writing?”

It was a very positive question.

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Mrs. Warder turned the envelope over.

Christina laid down her huge white muff.

"Is Benny writing you?"

"Apparently."

"Why?"

"He's very fond of writing letters, isn't he?"

"To you?" The wrinkle in Christina's forehead grew deeper. "What about — me?"

"No. Not particularly. About himself mostly."

"About himself." Christina came still nearer. "Is this the first letter you've had from him?"

"No."

"It isn't!" She looked resentfully at the letter. "Did he write you first?"

"No."

"You wrote him!" She sat down beside Mrs. Warder. "You don't mean that you've been telling him — that you've told

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him that I'm going to marry Governor Gregory? "

" No." This was surely true. Mrs. Warder hardly believed that Benny could have got her longest letter yet.

Christina appeared relieved. " Because I must tell him that myself. I know just how."

" There's so much in that," observed Mrs. Warder.

" Yes." Yet Christina's tone implied an accession of doubt. " I wish that was over. If Benny wasn't so — so believing, but — and I suppose he'll marry somebody else. Of course, I want him to."

" Oh, he'll do that," said Mrs. Warder comfortingly. " They always do."

" Yes, of course. But Benny —"

" Do you think he's different from the rest? " Mrs. Warder smiled.

Christina jumped up. " He's Benny," she said, with a little catch in her voice. " I hate that old Survey. He's so far off."

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"Would you like him here?"

"Why, of course I would, Madam Kitty."

"I see. You would marry Governor Gregory and have Benny at your right hand, your very best friend."

Christina sat down on the floor and rested her chin in her hand. "If he only would, that would be perfect," she sighed.

"It's a form of perfection difficult to reconcile men to."

"I know. But Benny ought to understand. He's so straightforward and —"

"Straightforward? Benny?" mused Mrs. Warder. "I think he's a very complicated person."

"Complicated? Benny? Why you don't know him!"

"I think I know him very well," said Mrs. Warder complacently. "He writes such long letters."

"Well, I hope he doesn't talk about all sorts of things you never heard of, and don't

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care a button about." Christina tossed her head.

"That wouldn't bore me. Benny says delightfully subtle and unexpected things about his experiences."

"Oh!" Christina's tone sharpened. "I never discovered that he had anything that you could call an experience in that forsaken place."

"Probably a good many things happen to Benny that he would hardly speak of to you. He's certainly met some remarkable men, and an amazing woman or two, to say the least."

"Women? Why, I thought they were away off where —"

"It's difficult for a man to get so far away that some woman can't find him."

Christina thought for a moment. Then she said shyly: "Awful women, Madam Kitty?" She looked troubled.

Mrs. Warder considered. Then she said slowly: "Some of those strange daughters

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of the West have charms that are not to be despised. A handsome fellow like Benny — he is handsome, isn't he? ”

“ Oh my! ” exclaimed Christina, in real tribulation. “ He's dreadfully handsome, Madam Kitty.”

“ I was afraid of that. Of course one can't really judge from a photograph, but when I was looking at the one on your dressing-table the other day it occurred to me that it was the kind of face that belongs to a man women are never willing to let alone.”

“ Oh, I feel dreadfully uncomfortable,” said Christina, in a woeful voice; she got up and leaned drearily against the wall. “ It's a fearful thing for Benny to be meeting — people like that.”

“ It certainly is. I suppose he could tell us stories that would make us feel — well, we shall never hear them — that's one good thing.” And Mrs. Warder went over to rearrange a silver bowl of daffodils.

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"Oh dear! I wish you would let me see that letter, Madam Kitty. Benny has never said a thing to me about anything like that."

"I'm sure he wouldn't," said Mrs. Warder warmly. "There's a beautiful honor about him in regard to you. He tells me something here —" she glanced at the letter she still held — "and says that when it was all over, he went out of that hell-hole — there was some horrible fight — I think about a woman — the men were drunk — and walked a long hard mile over the snow and thought of Tina. It was really very charming — the way he put it."

"Charming!" exclaimed Christina. "It was lovely! Oh dear, dear! what will he think?"

"What about?"

"Why, when I marry Governor Gregory, of course."

"Misery in scarlet!" Mrs. Warder smiled. "My dear, he'll say the things that

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men always say in the circumstances — the things that we, who are the women, always resent.”

“ Well — ” Christina walked to the window and looked out, but the sleighs were not there yet — “ there is a chance that I shall marry Benny after all.”

“ Is there ? ”

“ Yes. But I’m so afraid — so horribly afraid that I shan’t.”

“ I don’t quite understand.”

“ You couldn’t. You see, it’s this way.” Christina sat down with a strong effort to appear like a composed and sensible person; to her mother she seemed a very pathetic and helpless child, into whose hands — for what strange purposes? — there was given the settling of the destinies of men. “ I’ve been so worried — so dreadfully worried, though I’ve always pretended I wasn’t. I love Benny, but I want to be the Governor’s wife, and if I married Benny and things ever went

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wrong, I should be furious to think I hadn't married Greg."

"But, Tina, just as many things would go wrong —"

"Ah! but I shouldn't care. And I shouldn't mind being horrid to Greg, but I couldn't be horrid to Benny. If I marry Greg and things go wrong, there'll be so much to cover it up. Anyway, he'd be a kind of state husband —"

"No husband is ever that, Tina."

"Well, Madam Kitty, there'd be so much going on all the time — we'd always be 'appearing' at functions and all that — we wouldn't have to spend as much time alone as Benny and I would — we couldn't be as intimate. I wouldn't be."

"My dear little girl —" Mrs. Warder laid her hand gently on Tina's — "you fancy that everything depends on you. You forget the man, and that he —"

"Oh well! I'm not going to think about

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it any more," said Christina decisively. "Whichever one I marry, it isn't my affair now."

"Not your affair?"

"No. I've fixed it this way, and it's settled. Whichever way it goes now, I shall know it was meant to go. If it happens to be Benny, this way, I shall never say to him when things go wrong that I wish I had married Governor Gregory. And if it's Greg —" But in the instant her self-control gave way: "Oh, Madam Kitty, what shall I do if it's Greg?"

"Tina, child, what do you mean?"

"This." Tina's voice was tragically intense. "While I was at Far End I wrote their names — like this — 'Benny and Tina' and 'Eben Gregory and Christina Sargent' — on two slips of paper and locked them up in my silver ring-box. And every night, after I've said my prayers, I shake the little box up and down, and I say to it, 'Benny! Benny!' You can never say that

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I haven't tried to marry Benny. He can never say I haven't wanted to be true to him."

There was consternation in Mrs. Warder's face. "But, Tina —"

"No, Madam Kitty. It's settled."

"You would decide so great a thing—"

"By leaving it to the judgment of God," said Christina, in a tone suddenly calm.

"The judgment of the —, I should say." Mrs. Warder shrugged her shoulders; she felt an overwhelming desire to shake a little sense into this distraught child.

But Christina faced her hardily. "It seems to me quite as sensible a way of selecting a husband as most people's. And it saves me from any responsibility in the matter."

Mrs. Warder was more appalled than she chose to let Tina understand. The fatalistic obstinacy that she inherited from both her parents threatened disaster to the child's future; it was an evidence of the same weakness that had taken her to Dicky Warder and

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persuaded Iliel to give her up — the blanched and enervated belief that what was to be would be.

But in the child the weakness was intensified until it became a malign species of strength.

“In a way, you know,” continued Christina, with an effort towards blitheness, “I feel that when once this is over, I shall settle down into being the calmest, most reasonable person alive. But it’s an awfully unsettling thing when you can’t imagine who you’re going to be this time next year.”

“It must be,” said Mrs. Warder. “And to think of yourself probably as the wife of Governor Gregory — not the fiancée, but the wife —”

“I can’t think why you’re so down on poor Greg, Madam Kitty.”

“As a husband to you, Tina?” Mrs. Warder leaned towards her; there was tender wistfulness in her face. “Can’t you under-

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stand, child, that just for this little perfect while you are the sweetest thing there is in the world — an unspotted girl? Some day you will look back and think it strange that you didn't understand the sweetness of that. You will feel bitter to think how little you cared — how ready you were to throw away your treasure. Because Governor Gregory — he is a disillusioned man of the world. The edge has long ago been taken from all his sensibilities towards women."

"You would have married him," said Christina bluntly.

"I?" The color came into Mrs. Warder's face.

"Oh yes you would! And if he was good enough for you, he's good enough for me."

"Oh no!" Mrs. Warder walked restlessly about the room. "You don't understand, Tina. That's quite different."

"I don't see why."

"You have a right to some things —"

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"That you haven't?" Tina asked, as Mrs. Warder hesitated.

"Child, it's so different. I couldn't make you understand."

"I don't see why it's different," persisted Christina.

"Well — never mind that. As a matter of fact, Tina, I didn't think Governor Gregory good enough."

"Oh-h!" Christina smiled provokingly. "It's just what I told father. You're both as romantic and sentimental as you can be. You haven't any practical view of life whatever. Anybody would think that two people who had been divorced —"

"Tina, please!" Mrs. Warder held up her hand in indignant dismay.

"Oh, I suppose I musn't say anything, but you know you and father both talk as if you were the most disillusioned people, and —"

"Tina, if you say another thing like that —"

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"Madam Kitty, I won't — I really won't. Except just that you and father are really such a perfect match in your ideas — Oh, I won't — I won't! I will be good — if you will let me have Benny's letter."

Mrs. Warder drew away.

"Did you think I didn't mean to have it?" continued Christina. "Did you think I was going to let you write to Benny and get answers that I wasn't to see?"

"Well, really!" exclaimed Mrs. Warder.

"Give me the letter," said Christina quietly.

"I can't give it to you, Tina."

"Please give it to me. If you don't —" Christina threw her muff violently on the table — "I will never marry Benny, no matter what the little box says."

"There are things in it that you mightn't like, Tina — things that might make you angry."

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Christina stamped her foot. "Do you think you can make me any angrier than I am now? I want that letter."

Mrs. Warder was a picture of perplexity. Outside, in the street, there was the sudden crash of sleigh-bells and a confusion of voices in contending speech and laughter.

Christina looked out of the window. "They're here, but I shall not go unless you give that letter to me."

"Very well." Mrs. Warder spoke with cold decision. "You may have it. I shall of course have to tell Benny that I was disloyal enough to give it up."

"Please don't take the trouble," said Christina loftily. "I will tell Benny myself all that he needs to know."

Mrs. Warder went to the window and watched Christina take her place beside Governor Gregory,—winsome, willful, Christina, the gayest looking little girl in all the town to-

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day; a child who had never felt the dark and knew no fear of the night. The sun was always somewhere in the sky for Tina.

Mrs. Warder sighed and then smiled. The child was at once an uncomfortably keen and a very dense young person. It was to be hoped that it would never occur to her that Madam Kitty had designed her to read that letter. It was a triumphant justification of her statement to Mr. Gregory that Benny was a born lover. There were sentences in it that Mrs. Warder had read once and not again; they revealed with unconscious transparency what was, after all, for her little girl alone.

Would the girl understand? Perhaps not. She herself had not understood. But Benny was not the sort of youth that Iliel had been. A born lover, he was also a born fighter, and it was on his ability to fight that Mrs. Warder was now counting.

She no longer tried to explain it to herself — she shrank from analysis of the passion to

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defeat Gregory that was filling her days with energy and her nights with scheming. The reasons that she had defiantly given to him and to Sargent she refused now to remember.

Il faut s'amuser. The board was beside her — the pieces under her hand; she would be a fool to let pass so rare an opportunity of playing Providence.

But as she sat there, thinking, the look that grew upon her face had little of amusement in it. That ring-box! The poor child! She had an impulse to go up-stairs and find it and walk with it to the river.

But that mood passed. Let be! Perhaps Tina's uncouth way of forcing speech upon the Sphinx was of that innocence of the babes which would prove wiser than the cunning of the serpent. In so hopelessly tangled a problem as marriage there was no straight road to happiness, whatever the finger-post might say.

She felt suddenly tired and disheartened. She must see the end of this affair, whatever

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it might be, and then go away — she would go abroad.

“Sentimental and romantic! A perfect match in their ideas!” And Christina had said that to Sargent.

She sat up straight, coloring like a girl. If he supposed — but there she stopped. What could he suppose from the way in which she herself had talked to him?

But as for him! — Iliei Sargent was as deplorably unromantic as a man who wrote subtly romantic plays was bound to be.

That was one thing she was sure of,— so sure that she kept on insisting upon it with herself, her sense of humor for the time being in abeyance.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BARRED WAY OF LOVE

81 SIGNAL STREET,
March 11.

Dear Mr. Sargent:—

(Sargent muttered something; then he read on.)

It has occurred to me that you may like to know what is happening here. You may gather from Tina's letters that nothing is happening — that would be a mistake.

I did not tell you when I saw you that I had been writing Benny Faber and hearing from him. Our correspondence was not particularly interesting then, because I was merely finding my way about in his mind. (Sargent smiled.) It has become interesting

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since. I have written to him that he must come East at once and marry Tina, and he has replied that he cannot — that it is impossible for him to desert the Survey at this moment, as they are going farther north, and that his only means of getting leave would be by resigning his position, a disastrous thing for him to do. As he seems to be unable to understand that he will lose Tina unless he does something desperate, I have to-day telegraphed him to come at once — and I think my telegram will bring him, unless they have already started north, in which case he advised me that it would probably be impossible for any word to reach him — so much depending on the weather.

It has been very hard to convince him that anything more serious was the matter than one of Tina's moods. He has insisted that I did not understand her. He feels that she belongs to him inseparably. If he were only here, there would be no need for anyone

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to worry, for he does not lack faith in himself as the only possible husband for Tina.

My telegram to-day was a long one. He will come.

Has Tina told you about the ring-box? You see, it all turns on that. I have tried to find out when it is to be opened, but she will not tell me.

As to Mr. Gregory — but I cannot talk of him.

Of course you may not approve of what I am doing. That no longer matters to me.

KITTY WARDER.

Sargent lighted a cigar; when he had finished it, he lighted another. Then he wrote a note. It began "Dear Kitty," and was signed "Iliel," and it consisted of a single sentence: "Tell me about the ring-box." Then he walked with it to the station to catch the mail-train.

When he came back he smoked more cigars,

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for he had begun waiting for the answer to that note as soon as it was posted. After a while, thinking on Benny's irrational youth and the pity of it, he wondered what kept the boy from going crazy, away out there, where letters, if they ever reached you, were ancient history, and where telegrams assumed the significance of death-warrants.

Three days later he was still smoking, and still waiting for the answer to his note.

It became unendurable. For all he knew, anything might have happened; Tina might have married Gregory. He went to the telephone, and after an eternity of "holding the line," he succeeded in procuring speech with Mrs. Warder, but it seemed as if a great many other people were "holding the line" too, or else she was purposely maladroit; he could not discover which. His letter? Oh yes! Yes, she would answer it. He was worried about Tina? But why? She was taking care of Tina. Oh, did he wish to hear from

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her? She had not quite gathered that from his — did he call it a letter?— She had rather thought it was a note.

That was really all his little outing over the wire achieved for him. He had spent hours planning the subtle things he would say, but there was little chance for subtlety by the long distance route. He realized now that he had said good-by to her three times without the least intention of doing so, and that each time she had answered: "No, I don't think so." What possible question of his had she supposed herself answering? Or had she been merely amusing herself? She was capable of that.

It would have been far better to write; he looked resentfully at the telephone — it was an instrument of man's indignity. "Hulloa! Hulloa!" he exclaimed scornfully, and began an elaborate argument with himself that the world had been much better off before its invention.

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At all events Madam Kitty had written him first; that was a fact that it consoled him to remember. After his interview with her in town, he had come home to go through many moods. He set himself back into the youth of his marriage in the light of Mrs. Warder's interpretation of it and him, one day denying that he had failed in his part, and the next scorning himself for a young, thick-headed driveler of hang-dog philosophies. He had let her go to Dicky Warder; he had helped her to go with his idealistic maunderings as to the rights of the individual.

Bless the boy! She had had no rights apart from him. When she married him, her rights and his were fused; it was no longer "Thou and I," but the indivisible "We."

No! He shook his head. That argument would not hold water; in fact no argument of any sort that concerned marriage sustained itself with that simplicity of conviction that so persistent a human institution de-

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manded as its basis, save such as his friend Shaw took delight in vociferating. And for that species he had, at the moment, no taste.

Indeed his brains appeared to have gone off on a vacation; he was certainly not the man who, a month before, had written *Susan Always Said* in forty-eight hours, and who, in forty-eight more, had news of it in rehearsal. He had not wits enough left to write a comedy for cats, much less to finish *The Moth and the Marquise*, which he had begun in such ardor.

Tina — even Tina had said that he let Dicky Warder take her mother away.

He might have kept her! That was the thought that was driving what little of mind he had left round and round in a circle. Kitty Sargent, as she might have been by now, a sweetly magnificent sort of woman, a wonder of tenderness and loyalty, and all those womanly qualities that the heart of man justly adored!

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“What a luscious lollypop!” he exclaimed, his sense of humor getting the upper hand of his dreams; it occurred to him that a man was never able to describe other than stupidly what he desired in the woman he would have as wife.

But certainly not Mrs. Warder — a spoilt, capricious, selfish woman of the world, charming, distracting, troubling — everything that was a temptation to a man's emotions, and a superficial luxury. She went with the champagne and the glitter of factitious living — she was a gilded rose, perfumed anew each night, and picturesquely refreshed each morning. There was nothing spontaneous or natural left in her.

That was, perhaps, a trifle sweeping. Of course, the reason that she gave for her interest in Benny's cause was a clever bit of histrionism; no, not altogether; she undoubtedly had a strain of simplicity in herself that she still cherished. Women always managed to

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preserve a sentiment for the extraordinary hodge-podge of emotion, chastely afflicted with sensuousness, that they called love. The Lord knew, perhaps, what they thought they meant; no man ever had.

But what obstinate belief in her own wisdom there was in this fight against Gregory — against Tina! He puzzled long over the secret of that, always with the picture of her in his mind as she had stood while she said to him: “Because I believe in love — the kind there was between you and me when you did love me — the only kind that’s worth anything.”

It would help away the sting of some things that still remained bitter to him if he could only think that she believed that. After all, why not accept her statement as the only explanation of her interference in Tina’s affairs?— give her the benefit of belief in her? It was a graceful, if not imperative, thing to do in view of the fact that he was unable to

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devise an even temporarily plausible substitute for her own simple assertion.

But she had lived for fifteen years — with Dicky Warder.

When he came to that place in the circle, he turned and went back.

Occasionally he chid himself for his lack of concern as to Tina's affairs; all sense of responsibility had slipped from him. It was not that he had ceased to care, but his day with Tina was by. He understood that with degrees of bitterness that varied with his moods. He no longer counted with her, after all the nineteen years in which she had been his first thought; no one counted. Tina was waiting, unconscious, helpless child, for the word that should open wide to her the barred way of love and pain. If she married Gregory — what use to think about it; he could not believe Mrs. Warder would permit that to happen.

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Sargent waited three days more, but her promised letter did not come; then he made up his mind to go to town. He was not able to write, and Far End, unless you were busy and at peace with your Maker and your soul, was a weariness of hill and sky. He dreaded the long evenings in the big, still house. It was different when Tina was there, but she would never be there, at home, again. He knew that now.

He had meant to go to the post-office to see if the last train from town brought in any mail, but he had argued himself out of his intention. Of course there would be no letter for him. Mrs. Warder was — well, it was all his own fault for his madness in sending Tina to her to begin with.

He looked at his watch, but it was too late now to reach the office before it closed. No doubt if he had gone, this time, there would — but there was a knock at the door.

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"Come in, Cousin Belle," he called out.

She came in, stepping gently in the darkness.

"Shan't I turn on the light, Iliel?" she asked, in her soft, solicitous voice.

"Yes — turn it on," he said resignedly.

She did so, and pulled down the shades, and the sloping line of pine trees that climbed Sunset Hill in the winter twilight was shut from him.

But Cousin Belle sat down contentedly in the cheerful light she had brought into a dark place. "I have something I want to say to you, Iliel," she began, "and I have your mail. I was there when the train came in."

She opened her bag and handed him the letters; the papers and a magazine she laid neatly on the table at his elbow.

Sargent ran quickly through the letters; he kept one and pushed the others away from him.

As she was not told to go, Cousin Belle re-

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mained, sustained by a conviction that what she had to tell Iliel was quite as momentous as anything in the letter he was reading so devouringly. It was a long letter and he read it apparently to the last word, and then began in the middle again, and when he had finished the second time, he went back to the first page and looked at the date — the date was often such an important thing in these business letters.

At last he looked up. "Oh, Cousin Belle!" He appeared to adjust his intelligence to the fact that she was there with some difficulty.

"You look as if you had good news," she said pleasantly.

"Good news!" He stared at her in a puzzled way. "No — I haven't. I think it's bad news, Belle."

"Bad!" she exclaimed. "But you seem happy, Iliel."

"I am,"

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"Happy over bad news, Iliel?"

"There's something else, too. But never mind that. You wanted to talk to me?" Sargent ran his hand through his hair and looked at her in such a strange way that she felt disturbed. She had seen him in many moods, but never in one like this, she was sure.

"I'm so sorry, Iliel — I have no wish to speak of my own affairs when you — well, I mean now, but you see, Mr. Brown — oh, Iliel, I have given him my word that I will marry him on the second of April."

She looked ready to cry, and yet she was as contradictorily happy as Iliel himself.

"Well?" he said kindly. "Isn't that a very fortunate thing for Mr. Brown?"

"But Iliel! What will you do?"

"I? Oh, I'm all right."

She regarded him mournfully. "All right! — left with only servants in the house, and in spite of all I've taught her, I know

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Bessy will never do the dusting with her conscience when I am not here to watch, and yet she is a dear girl."

Sargent got up and went over to her, laying his hand on her shoulder.

"Dear Belle, don't worry. I'm going to get married myself."

Cousin Belle looked up at him slowly. "You're going to get married yourself, Iliel? When? Who to?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know."

"I mean when. Oh, as soon as I can, Belle — as soon as I can. But she doesn't know yet."

"She doesn't know yet?" A certain anxiety crept into Cousin Belle's eyes mingled of many elements. If it was Mrs. Dryder after all — but you couldn't imagine Mrs. Dryder not knowing. It was that last play — that was what it was; she had always said that sooner or later Iliel would have brain fever.

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Sargent laughed. "You'll have to remember now that you don't belong to every church in town." And then he added: "She doesn't know that she is going to marry me."

And with that he put Cousin Belle gently out of the room. For at last he understood his part and he wanted to be alone with it.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SIMPLE I WILL

Mrs. Warder stood at the end of her drawing-room saying good-night to the last of her dinner guests, who happened to be Governor Gregory. It struck him that she had never justified her reputation as the most distinguished hostess in town more significantly than this evening; everything had been perfect of its kind — the combination of mutually attractive men and women, the conversation, the lights, and the color.

And Mrs. Warder herself had never looked more effective. Her gown was of lemon-colored velvet, made with the simplicity for which she was noted; a necklace of wonderfully cut topazes and a spray of them in her

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dark hair served as high lights in the delicate glow of her costume. In this smoke-gray room, with a single great jar of yellow daffodils as a decorative link between itself and her, she had seemed all the evening like a star apart, attended by its own radiance. Yet she had never been sweeter or simpler; she appeared to have changed places with Tina — Tina, who to-night had borne herself with the airs of a young princess.

As he stood beside the girl earlier in the evening she had said to him abruptly: "I have something to say to you to-morrow, Governor Gregory. You may come to see me at three o'clock." She was panoplied in a dignity that had all the seals of office upon it.

"Thank you," said Gregory, with an answering gravity that he found it difficult to maintain. But Tina was a capricious person; the game of politics was a simple affair compared with that of making love to her. He

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was no such fool as to imperil at the eleventh hour what it had required weeks of the most cautious effort to accomplish.

But he could not suppress the exhilaration he felt as he stood taking leave of Mrs. War-der.

"Good-night," she said, with smiling absence of emphasis.

He looked around and saw that Tina was gone.

"Are you — a little bit — well, overdoing it?" he asked.

"Overdoing what, Mr. Gregory?"

"The unrelenting parent, I think they call it."

Her eyes smiled.

"You see —" he continued — "I'm afraid you'll have to come to it."

"To what?" The smile flickered adorably about her mouth.

"Well —" He knew that he was acting the boy, impatient and indiscreet, but he was

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past caring for that — with her. He was in love, he, Eben Gregory, and the little girl he loved was going to tell him to-morrow at three o'clock that she would marry him. In his life he had had to buy and pay for everything he had enjoyed with wages earned by hard work; to-morrow he was to get for the asking that which he had grown most insistently to desire. He had traveled a long, hard road; he had known hunger and cold and heat and the brow's sweat; he had made his mistakes — been a fool where duller men were wise — but he had never auctioned his birthright in the market-place. There were things he hoped this little Tina would never have to know, but if she must, he would not deny them. He had never evaded, never shirked the consequences of any of his deeds, however unjustly the balance may have seemed sometimes to dip on his side of the scales.

But that was past for him now; he had paid

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his debts and torn up the score. To-morrow he was to begin again with a clean sheet.

"Well, you see, Christina has told me that to-morrow at three she would have something to say to me."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Warder. "You are quite sure," she added, giving him a long glance.

"How can I be anything else?"

"Tina is fond of sensational effects," she suggested.

"So am I," he answered gaily, and said good-night.

Mrs. Warder went up-stairs to her room intending to read a while before she went to bed. But she found one book after another unsatisfactory; she was thinking of Tina; then by a natural gradation her thoughts slipped to Sargent. Presently she faced the fact that of late she had thought of little else but Sargent. The dinner this evening had been for him alone; he had been the unseen

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guest for whom she had worn her yellow gown — to whom she had talked and smiled with a sweetness that was sweet to herself. As she had gone down the staircase and fronted the great mirror, she had stopped and looked at herself, wishing that he could see her. She was lovely to-night — and young; she had not looked like this that afternoon when he had seen her. He might not like her — of course he hated her — but to-night he would have been compelled to admire her; she stood long before her mirror and triumphantly assured herself of that.

Tina would soon be married — to one man or the other, and she would be alone again. But now she would know that she was lonely. Five years ago to be lonely had meant freedom.

She was tired of everything — tired of this dull town with its eternal round of exhausted social activities; she could imagine the interest of it for people who were still climbing,

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but when she had married Dicky Warder, she had taken her place at the top of the ladder — there was nothing for her to aspire to or to struggle for. Her social position had been bought and paid for by generations of Warders — she owned it as she owned her house and horses.

She had a volume of Sargent's plays beside her; she picked it up and turned to the scene in *The Master of Lone Pine* where Acacia discovers that the man she loves is a pawnbroker. She read it again and shook her head at the same place that she always shook it; any woman could have told Sargent that Acacia would never have said that to Spenderson. Apparently he used to read to Tina everything he wrote. What did Tina know? She shut the book feeling annoyed with him and with herself for caring what mistakes he made in that play or any other. It was no concern of hers.

Really, after all the trouble she had taken

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for him and his daughter, she had received but the scantiest acknowledgment. A single line in answer to her letter! — then a talk over the telephone, in which he upbraided her for not answering his precious six-word note. That was just like Iliel. She got up and found the letter — it was not difficult — and read it again in order to impress its indifference upon her mind. By and by she smiled. “Kitty” and “Iliel” — and only those six words between! It was rather charming considered in that light. But it was only women who discovered sentiment in trifles like that; in their relations with women after they had passed a certain point, men only understood the flatly obvious.

Still, Iliel was not the ordinary man. In spite of psychological inaccuracies here and there in his plays, it must be admitted that he drew his women well. In twenty years he had learned more than most men as to the

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nature of the protagonist in the great human play.

She wondered, as she had wondered a hundred times, what he had thought of her that afternoon. She had talked outrageously — her face burnt whenever she remembered one thing that she had said. But an interview with the man who had once been one's husband was a difficult matter; she must never see him again; she would never need to after this affair of Tina's was settled.

At the thought of Tina she started up in sudden apprehension. What was the child going to tell Gregory to-morrow? She had hardly seen her all day. Was it possible that she had already opened that hateful box?

Such alarm seized her that she went at once to Tina's room; she knocked softly.

There was a stir, then unanswering silence. She knocked again, after a little pause. Instantly, the door was thrown open, and Tina

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stood there in her night-dress; it was evident that she had been crying, and without a word she held a slip of paper towards her mother.

Mrs. Warder took it; on it was written, "Eben Gregory and Christina Sargent." She shut the door and silently drew the child to her until she had her in her arms.

Presently she said softly: "Tina, Tina, little, naughty Tina!" A flood of tears answered her.

She began to think quickly; in the face of such evident misery it seemed incredible that Tina could remain loyal to the lot she had drawn. But she would. There was the unbelievable crotchet in the girl's temperament, compounded of obstinacy and superstition, and — Mrs. Warder was in no mood to flinch from acknowledgment — of that acquired belief in marriage as a feeble expedient that the separation of her parents had produced in her. From the days of her babyhood she had heard marriage treated as the butt of jest and satire;

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inevitably she comprehended nothing of the human need that underlay the simple "I will" that set a man and a woman apart as one. The child understood something of love — enough to feel that love was more apt to be marred than to be glorified by marriage. That was all. And she had before her, in the case of her father and mother, irrefutable evidence of the flimsiness, under strain, of vow and wedlock.

There was only one way; Mrs. Warder understood in this moment all the meaning of the cry in her own heart, of her restlessness, her fear of loneliness — she must tell the child. She must tell her the truth as she was learning it after all these years.

"Tina," she began gently, "you must marry Benny. There is nothing else to do."

"No, no!" Christina drew away from her.

"But you must. Listen to me. You've come to a place where you must take my word

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for it, child. I know things that you don't. I know what marriage is and what a bitter thing it can be to some women — women like you and me. And it's only love that avails in the hard places, Tina — enough love — always more and more of it. That's what a boy and a girl don't understand. They're not careful of the love they begin with, Tina. They wound it in so many ways. Little girl —" she held Christina nearer to her — "try to understand what it is so hard for me to explain to you. You think of it as getting married. But it's the long afterwards that you must think of. When the child comes, Tina, the man is satisfied, and she — if she is like you and me — is never less satisfied. A man like Governor Gregory would care nothing for that, but I think Benny would, if you were patient and helped him to understand."

"Why weren't you?" asked Christina, in a voice that was steady and cold; she was no longer tearful.

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“Because I didn’t know. I had no one to tell me as you have. I had married believing as most girls believe, and as people let them believe, that marriage was a state in which I was to be continually adored, and when all the little backbiting miseries of poverty had to be reckoned with — when I had pain to suffer, and endless duties to perform — I let go, Tina. That wasn’t my idea of marriage.” The tears were suddenly in Mrs. Warder’s eyes.

Christina looked at her with frigid curiosity. “I shall not have poverty to contend with.”

“No.” The color came into Mrs. Warder’s face. “*I* didn’t have — after I married Mr. Warder.”

“It seems to me you had everything in the world to be thankful for,” said Christina hardily. “You had all the money you wanted, and no children.”

“Yes. I had all the money I wanted and

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no children." Mrs. Warder hesitated. "Think about it a minute, Tina. There are ways in which all the money she wants and no children may be — destruction to a woman."

"I don't think so." The girl laughed flippantly. "I don't want any children."

"Be quiet!" Mrs. Warder's face paled. "You don't know what you're talking about. You don't know what it is to feel that everything in you that is finest has been created just that you may have a child, and then not be allowed to have one, because your beauty must not be marred — because you were bought to be enjoyed and exhibited as a work of art. Tina!" — she wrung the girl's hand — "I've paid a price for what I understand, and I don't want you to pay it too."

"I shall marry Governor Gregory," said Christina.

Mrs. Warder looked at her; they looked at each other. But in that moment the

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mother remembered those days in the poor little house at Far End before the child was born and afterwards, when she had rebelled at every detail of her woman's lot and resented the waste of her youth and beauty upon a boy who made the mistake of accepting his wife as a matter of course, and not acclaiming her every new morning as a special creation wonderfully mated with his unworthiness — those days when rebellion had been the keynote of all her thoughts and actions, and the spirit of it breathed deep into the soul of the child at her breast.

"Perhaps you will," she said gently, "but if you do, you shall do it knowing all that I can tell you. I want you to think of yourself married to Mr. Gregory, and coming in time to understand what love is, and then finding out that what you feel for Benny is that love."

"I've thought of it," said Christina indifferently.

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Mrs. Warder shook her head; the color came again into her face; she moved away from Christina, and sat for some moments in silence. When she spoke her voice was light and breathless. "Tina, don't you *see*? — don't you know why I'm talking to you as I am? Oh, it's so hard! I don't know how to tell you. I don't know how to tell myself." But she controlled herself proudly. "I love your father, Tina. I have always loved him. I think there has never been a day since I left him when he has been out of my thoughts. I made a great mistake. I do not want you to do that too, and you must know, child — somebody must tell you that love is real — that it's meant for every day — that it —"

"You love father?" Christina looked hostilely at Mrs. Warder. "That doesn't seem to me a very nice thing for you to tell me."

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"Nice?" Mrs. Warder felt curiously helpless.

"It's horrid. Why, you can't even consider father an acquaintance of yours, and to say that you love him!" Christina deliberated; then she added: "Please don't ever say a thing like that to me again. There isn't any need for you to love father. *I* love him."

In other circumstances Mrs. Warder would have smiled at the girl's effort to dispose with dignity of a situation that did not meet with her approval, but she perceived, with new alarm, that Christina was now in the mood when everything became fuel to her obstinacy, and that her sacrificial avowal of her enduring love for Sargent was apt to have only disastrous results.

She rose to go, saying quietly: "There are some things one does not speak of twice." Then she melted at the sight of the forlorn

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little figure — Tina looked such a baby in her night-dress. She bent over her. “Go back to Far End, Tina. Go back to your father to-morrow.”

Christina clasped her little hands despairingly together. “I shall never go back to Far End again, Madam Kitty — never like that. That’s all gone.”

“What is the matter?” cried Mrs. War-der, suddenly beside herself. “Do you know that you seem to me to be making misery for everyone, just because you want to know what it’s like!”

For answer Christina picked up the slip from the table where Mrs. War-der had laid it.

“That! Benny will soon make short work of that!”

“Benny?”

Mrs. War-der threw her discretion to the four winds. What was the use of it in deal-

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ing with a child like this? "Yes. You see he will be here —" she reckoned silently on her fingers —

"Benny?" said Christina again; she put her hand up to her throat.

"I telegraphed him this morning."

"You telegraphed him?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I thought he ought to be here. I thought you needed him, Tina."

"Was that for you to say?"

"I think so," said Mrs. Warder gently.

For a moment there was silence; then Christina said in a low voice: "Go away, please."

"Tina!"

"Will you please go away?"

"I can't." Mrs. Warder felt herself nearer to a fit of hysterics than she had been for many years. "Not while you are so an-

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gry and so irrational, Tina. I can't stand by and see you hurt yourself and Benny without —"

Christina was on her feet. "If he comes I shall die. Why didn't he come before? Why did he leave me alone so long? I told him I couldn't stand it. I can't love a man I never see, Madam Kitty. I've told Benny that, over and over again, and he's always laughed. He's always said he knew me better than I knew myself. But he didn't, Madam Kitty—he didn't. He doesn't know me a bit. His letters have been all wrong—they've hurt me so—I've cried myself asleep over them so many nights. But now it's all over, and it's Benny I'm sorry for. Poor Benny! But who's going to tell him? Do you expect me to tell him that I'm going to marry Governor Gregory? Tell Benny that!"

"My child, you won't have to. He knows."

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Christina stood back. "You've told him?"

Mrs. Warder nodded; she saw, too late, that she had made a mistake.

For a moment the girl stood still; then she went to the table and took out of the little ring-box the slip that lay in it.

"Benny and Tina," she said in a strained voice, and tore the slip in two.

It was nearly dawn when Mrs. Warder finished her letter to Sargent — the letter with the bad news that was good, and so mystifying to Cousin Belle. She wrote it with little thought of herself; her mind was full of her child.

CHAPTER XXIII

“TINA! TINA!”

A few minutes after Christina met Governor Gregory in the drawing-room the next afternoon, she had promised to marry him in three weeks; he demonstrated to her that there was nothing to be gained by delay. He also suggested that the wedding should be an absolutely private affair, which was contrary to his earlier intentions; but he felt that he had excellent reasons for haste — Tina was an uncertain young person. The business of the box was an amusing affair — very lucky for him — but he had his questions as to the enduring nature of the spell of so blind a decree. As Mrs. Warder had observed, Tina was fond of sensations; that slip of paper constituted for the moment a

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very powerful one, of which he must take immediate advantage. The risks he foresaw with her he was willing to run, for his career promised excitement enough to keep her preoccupied, and he had, moreover, the belief in his ability to hold a woman in marriage that a strong and successful lover of women always has.

He asked to see Mrs. Warder, and Christina went and her mother came — to-day a mocking, indolent woman; but Gregory had no intention of being irritated. He explained to her that he and Tina were to be married in three weeks.

“How delightfully soon!” she exclaimed. “Is it to be a spectacular affair?”

“Quite private,” he answered, in his most business-like tone. “Tina can have all the pageants she wants later on. Only ourselves and Mr. Sargent — I hope?” His look inquired.

“You know his address,” she suggested.

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"Of course I shall write to him at once."
He stood up. "You have not congratulated me, Mrs. Warder."

"On what?" she asked, suddenly serious. But she would not wait for him to answer. "On the luck of getting a child to marry you who does not know her own mind? — or rather, who does know it, and who because of some strange and fateful obstinacy will not accept happiness?"

"You persist in being tragic," he said lightly. "It suits you."

"Sooner or later we all get our turn." She smiled and let him go.

Later in the afternoon Mrs. Warder went out driving with Christina, but they said little to each other; the girl seemed to have drawn a circle around herself within which her mother might not step. She was as stupidly gay as a mechanical doll; all her youthful spontaneity was gone. Mrs. Warder looked at her and reflected that as the wife of Gre-

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gory she would probably become an audacious, glittering kind of person, shop-worn and tired by the time she was thirty.

She wondered whether Christina had told Gregory that Benny was coming; she thought not.

The next morning there was a special delivery letter for Mrs. Warder from Sargent, with so little and yet perhaps so much in it that she spent the day trying to decide exactly what it did not mean. He was evidently sufficiently anxious about Christina, for he said that he was coming to town immediately; there might be something that he could do — she would know. At any rate she must not be left alone with such a serious and difficult matter on her hands.

She went to a theater party that evening and to supper somewhere afterwards, but when Lone Hand Freddy said to her: “What did you think of the play, Mrs. Warder?” she looked at him, and answered:

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"The play, Mr. Dorchester?" and he discovered that she did not even know the title of it. She was embarrassed and tried to remember of what she had been thinking. But it was all a blur, with perhaps a good deal of Far End behind it, and some strange memories of the little home that, for a while, had been Iliel's and hers. She could not think of him as the master of the Mansion House; that had always seemed to them such a wonderful place; she recalled how they used to walk past it, in that first springtime of their marriage, and dream their bright, impossible dreams of some day possessing it.

She answered his letter. But when she read what she had written, she put it away; it was for herself — not for him.

Besides, to-morrow he would be at the Lorraine; perhaps he would come to see her.

But the next morning he called her up on the telephone; Cousin Belle was ill — apparently seriously ill; he must not leave Far End

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until there was some improvement in her condition. He seemed troubled and anxious. Tina?—he had no patience with Tina—she needed to be whipped and put to bed. As for Gregory—he needed to be thrashed for an old fool.

Mrs. Warder laughed. “Oh, be gentle! We all have more or less fool to work out of our natures.”

“I dare say,” he answered. “But at forty-five—don’t you think—”

“Oh yes, I do.”

In spite of the telephone he discerned the quick sadness in her voice.

“I suppose I must see Gregory at once,” he said. “But I’m afraid I shall accomplish nothing.” Then he added: “It is you that I want to see.”

That “you” was with her through the night when she could not sleep; she was not unhappy awake.

The next day and the next brought no an-

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swer to her telegram to Benny. That meant that the Survey had gone further north; she grew nervous. For some reason, all her own happiness seemed dependent now on her success in securing Benny's welfare; the matter had ceased to be a question solely of the boy and the girl — it had become personal to herself. Benny and Tina and Sargent — in her thoughts they belonged together. She could not imagine Gregory as Sargent's son-in-law — there was something preposterous in the idea; the years would but increase the hostility of the father against the worn man of the world who had made his daughter his wife. In the other case there was the compelling fitness of things, and the innocence inseparable from youth to dignify the mating of these children born to love as the flower to bloom.

But a wedding in less than three weeks and no word from Benny! And Cousin Belle dangerously ill, fighting pneumonia, with the

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Reverend Austin Brown praying at one side of her bed, while the doctor practiced at the other, and Iliel waiting, longing to go, yet not willing to leave this friend who had been all patience and unselfishness in his household these long years — who had kept burning for him and Tina the hearth-fire in a forsaken home.

So the days that followed passed for Mrs. Warder in a curious stillness and inactivity, marked, however, by a change in herself that puzzled and fascinated her. Time and again she found herself in front of Dicky Warder's picture, answering it — arguing, defying — as she had never answered or defied the living man.

“You're dead, Dicky,” she said aloud one day, “and it doesn't seem fair, but these things have to be said.”

Then she felt suddenly faint with the weight of her body — so it seemed; the moment before she had been clear spirit, face

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to face with Dicky. But her old fear was gone — the fear from which she had suffered ever after the instant when he had said to her: "Now, at last, you are my wife." Because then, for the first time, she had understood what it was that she had done to Iliel Sargent and herself. It would be so with Tina, the first time she found herself alone with Eben Gregory the husband. The child would know then the wrong done to herself and Benny. But how could she be made to understand that now, before it was too late? Mrs. Warder did not know, for the barrier between mother and daughter rose higher each day. Tina was buying and ordering clothes with reckless indifference, but that was the only sign of an approaching wedding. Any direct reference to it had become impossible between them.

Afterwards Mrs. Warder remembered of these days little beyond her talks with Sar-

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gent over the telephone. Time and again he was on the point of starting for town, but she kept him at Far End; his presence there was Cousin Belle's due, and she was still too ill to bear any explanation of his absence.

Sargent had heard from Gregory and had replied to the Governor with disapproval that amounted to denunciation of his intentions, but Gregory maintained his serenity even through an interview with Mrs. Warder that must have pricked his temper. She asked, not that he give up Christina, but that he consent to a longer engagement.

“At my time of life!” he exclaimed, smiling. “No, no, Mrs. Warder. I regret your lack of sympathy for me, but by and by we shall be friends again. In the meantime as long as Tina is satisfied —” he spread his hands.

“Satisfied? Do you think she is? Can you look at her these days and believe that?”

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"The way of a maid!" He shrugged his shoulders. "Marriage has its own happy ways of settling all that."

A bitter answer rose to Mrs. Warder's lips. But she held it. After all, Benny might yet come, and she felt sudden pity for this man who must early have been forced to the use of tooth and claw in the getting and keeping of what he needed. The wonder was that there should be so much of grace left in him.

Of that grace Christina saw more in these days than any mortal ever was to see, and that but added to her bewildered misery. For somewhere amid her confusion of thought there was a belief that sooner or later Gregory was to be hurt, and that she was to hurt him. It was her consciousness of this, and not the stirring of love for him as Gregory believed to his intoxication, that touched her manner sometimes with a distracting tenderness. Those were the times



*T*HERE were times when Gregory forgot the
press and anxiety of official affairs and
remembered that he adored this little girl
whose charms were hedged within so many
thorns

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when Gregory forgot the press and anxiety of official affairs and remembered that he adored this little girl whose charms were hedged within so many thorns. But it was easy to be patient; his hour was near.

Alone with herself, Tina knew that she was sick — sick from the tormentings of the demon that had entered into her. There were times when she looked at the people about her and wondered that they did not understand — that they did not take her and put her to sleep in some quiet, white-walled place where she might dream and dream, and wake at last to find herself a child again and Benny waiting for her, out there in the sunshine, calling, “Tina! Tina!”

But no one understood. Her father had sent her to Madam Kitty for no reason that he had ever been able to explain to her; she remembered how helpless he had seemed. That was part of this. No one had stood up and said she was not to leave Far End, and

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no one now said that she was not to marry Governor Gregory; they wanted to argue with her about it, as if she would listen to that! Benny would have said "No" to everything; but he was too far away. She had always told him trouble would come of that. If he came now — but he would not come; she was sure of that. Madam Kitty had told him about the box, and he would never forgive that. He would say that if she could choose between him and another man, she was to take the other, whatever the lot might be. Benny was a stern person. She remembered his slapping her once when she was a naughty little girl and then standing her in the corner and keeping her there until she cried to him again and again, "Benny, I good now. I good now." They had often laughed about that.

Yes, if Benny had never gone away, all this would never have happened; he would have understood.

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Sometimes she wondered dully what all the fuss was about, when the sole thing that she wanted was to be let marry Benny. But that was impossible now. She had promised to marry Governor Gregory, and Benny would let her do it, and be glad of it. So that was settled.

She hated Madam Kitty for not telling her anything more about him. It was a week and more since she had had a letter from him — a strange letter, with here a sentence about his work, and there one beginning, “Do you remember, Tina —” and then something that hurt as nothing had hurt her in her life.

And so the days passed, and he did not come. She had been right; he would never come again.

But one morning there was a telegram for Mrs. Warder, which she opened and read in a silence so difficult to her that she found it impossible to remain in the room with Chris-

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tina; the girl's open indifference was unendurable. For all that she inquired or apparently cared, Cousin Belle might be dead, and this a notice of her funeral.

It was not that. Benny had got through to the railroad. He was coming.

And in her own room Mrs. Warder shut herself up and cried like a girl of twenty; she had never been so happy since that morning that Iliel had given her the primroses that he had gathered in Overshot Wood.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HARVEST OF HER DAYS

Gregory's big blue car was standing at the door of 81 Signal Street; it had been standing there a long time, and Gregory, waiting alone in the drawing-room, had grown impatient. But at last he heard Christina coming, very slowly, down the staircase. She paused in front of the great mirror; he knew that and smiled; she was looking at herself, vain little bird! Then he caught a snatch of the song she was murmuring:

“But I and my true love will never meet
again

On the bonnie, bonnie banks o' Loch
Lomond.”

and he smiled again.

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But he found her a stately and intangible person to-day; she would not go out with him, and she would not talk about their wedding. She sat straight and chill on a chair too far away, and Gregory unfortunately discovered himself tormented by an untimely desire for some approach to a normal condition of things between two people soon to be wed. He was growing tired of this bread-and-butter love-making; he craved a little spice.

"Father's in town," said Christina suddenly.

"Oh! When did he come?"

"Yesterday. No — the night before."

"Is he at the Lorraine?"

"Yes."

"Has he been here?"

"Yes."

"He hasn't been — troubling you?"

Christina looked at Gregory. "I don't think he's thinking very much about me."

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Gregory wondered. But aloud he said blithely: "That's good. There really isn't any reason why he should, when I'm thinking so much — about you."

He found it strangely difficult to say that, for Christina was still looking at him in an oddly disconcerting way. It was absurd — this touch-me-not attitude; he was heartily sick of his pretence of enjoying it. There was only one compensation in the present condition, and that was in the contrast that marriage would afford to it. But to-day he felt that it was unduly hard on a lover to demand that he subsist entirely on anticipations, especially as Christina, in her youthful inexperience and innocence, knew very little as to the possibilites of enjoyment in the state into which she was about to enter. She probably supposed that he experienced the maximum of bliss when he imprinted a polite kiss upon her forehead.

"I wish —" she began — then she paused.

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"Well? Hadn't you better say it?"

She leaned towards him; she was looking very sweet, and he felt himself quiver like a boy with the sudden hope that she would be sweet to him.

"Let us give it all up, Greg, before it's too late. You aren't going to be happy with me, and sometimes —" a wistful look came into her eyes — "I think you know it."

"Tina!" he cried out. But it was the truth; somewhere something was saying that to him. A girl had loved him once, and he had known it; he had not needed to persuade himself of it.

"No — you aren't going to be happy," she repeated. "You don't understand. You think I'm a little girl and that I don't understand. I've talked so much about being the Governor's wife —" She clasped her hands with a quick little sob and looked at him with wide eyes — "What is that — to be the Governor's wife! It's nothing. I've

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been awake all night, thinking about it. And I've thought over all the ways in which I should make you unhappy. Oh, you don't know. I should be dreadful. I should want to make you unhappy."

Because he doubted — because he was himself afraid, Gregory blundered. He laughed and caught Christina's hands in his.

"Don't bother about it, Tina. Every girl thinks about it as you're thinking now, just before she's married. It all comes right afterwards. Give me a kiss and forget it. You never have kissed me, you know."

Christina looked at him and felt something that she had never felt before.

"I think I'm not well to-day," she murmured in confusion and fear. "Isn't it very warm in here? I wish you'd open a window."

"Yes — I'll open it," he said wearily; he felt suddenly tired and discouraged and old.

As he passed her, Christina stood up.

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"I'm sorry." She spoke breathlessly: "I haven't been good. Everything's been wrong. Some day you'll forgive me, because — because I've tried, even though it doesn't seem so, to be fair to you — before it was too late."

"You mean —" began Gregory —

But there was a sudden stir in the hall — the opening and shutting of doors, and a subdued confusion of voices; then Sargent's voice, standing out alone.

"The train was so late."

Then Mrs. Warder's voice. "Do let me help you. Iliel, what is it? What is the matter with him?"

"Oh, don't worry, Mrs. Warder. It's nothing much — mostly bandages."

That was another voice — young and strong and sure. And at the first word Christina turned, her face suddenly white, her eyes wide, her hand clenched and slightly lifted.

"Benny!" she whispered. "Benny!"

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She ran the length of the room, and through the hall to the door of the library.

"Benny!" she cried aloud. "Benny!"

Mrs. Warder and Sargent stepped back. The boy held out his arms to the girl, and she went to him like a dove to its cote. He kissed her, murmuring, "Tina, Tina!" and she looked up at him with eyes that asked.

"Your hands?" she said at last. "What is the matter with your hands, Benny?"

"They got frozen," he said happily. "That awful forty miles, Tina — to drive and walk in a blizzard — the worst of the winter — that did it. Never mind now. Why, it's all right, Tina!"

For she was crying and clinging to him, and whispering wild and bitter things. But he stilled her, in his strong and gentle way, and then turned to Mrs. Warder.

"They got your telegram through to me just as that storm came on. They said I'd never get to Elko alive. I knew I should,

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and I had such luck. I always do. And at Council Bluffs a doctor got on the train — he took care of me all the way here. He wants to see you, Tina.”

“Benny — you didn’t — you didn’t tell him about me?”

“Sure — sure I did. Guess I didn’t tell him about much else.” The boy broke into an open laugh. “I had to have a good excuse for having acted like a fool, Tina.”

Late that night Mrs. Warder came downstairs and found Sargent in the library before the fire.

“Everything all right?” he asked.

“Yes — everything.” She smiled tremulously. “I’m to tell you — they want to be married at once, and go to the Mansion House for their honeymoon. Then they will be near Benny’s parents, and yet by themselves. It’s like a fairy tale. The boy is wonderful.”

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“He’s grown to be a man since he went away,” said Sargent. “We shall never know what a time he had in the blizzard.”

“No. But Tina understands. She has crossed the divide — she will never be again what she has been in the last three months. He does have luck. Those hands of his — Tina will never forget them as long as she lives. They will have their honeymoon and go back. He doesn’t know whether he has lost his place or not. He had no time to think of that. But it doesn’t matter. He will always have what he calls luck, because he will make it, if he has to, out of his misfortunes. I’ve sat and watched him up there, until I thought I should fall in love with him myself.” She laughed unsteadily. “I know all that Tina means when she talks about his muddled gray eyes and his slow smile. You see what an absurd mood I’m in!”

But she would not give Sargent time to answer her, and she did not look at him.

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“Why! I’ve just remembered. Governor Gregory was here when Benny came. He must have gone without saying a word to anyone. And Tina has never thought of him since. I know she hasn’t. It seems cruel.”

“Yes, it’s cruel,” said Sargent. “But Gregory would take chances. And he’s lost. I’m sorry for him. He’s a good sort, but he made a bad mistake. He gambled, and he lost. That’s just it.”

“Yes, he has lost.” Unconsciously Mrs. Warder looked up at the picture at the end of the room.

Had Dicky Warder always known the truth? — had he understood what she herself had not understood? — had he loved her, knowing after a while that she had never loved him — that she never would?

His last words came back to her, bringing a strange sorrow to her heart. He, too, had gambled and lost, and had died knowing it.

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And for the first time she looked at him forgivingly, for she realized that she herself had much need of forgiveness.

She knelt down in front of the fire and spread her hands to the blaze, shivering slightly.

"Are you cold?" asked Sargent anxiously.

"No, I don't think I'm cold. But I love the fire," she answered.

Silence fell between them in the quiet house, but their thoughts traveled together to the children up-stairs — the children beginning with just the number of years upon them with which they had begun, but beginning so differently. For behind them there was all the strength and understanding of a man and a woman who had traveled far in quest of love, far from each other, only to come face to face at last in a turn of the road, and find love where it always had been — in the heart of the one for the other.

"Kitty!"

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She turned and looked at him.

"She shall carry primroses at her wedding," she said.

He saw the tears in her eyes.

"Kitty!" he said again.

"Ah! but you couldn't — you couldn't forgive me," she cried.

But her words were such a supplication that he took her in his arms.

"Forgive you!" he whispered. "Oh Kitty, Kitty! how can I ever forgive myself?"

"But we have them — the children," she answered.

"You mean —"

"They'll never make our mistakes. We'll never let them."

"We?" he echoed. "What good am I? If it hadn't been for you —"

"For me!" She laughed softly, but there were more tears. "Iliel, don't you understand — don't you know, that I've only

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been able to do what I've done for Benny and Tina because — because — of this."

"Of this?" he asked, questioning his joy.

"Oh yes! this, this!" she answered, out of the abundance of her peace. "I did it for them, because I loved you — because I loved you, Iliel."

And up-stairs Benny and Tina kissed each other good-night for the hundredth time.

"She's a double track," said Benny. "That's what she is."

"I think she's my mother," said Tina softly, "but I shall always call her Madam Kitty."

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